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# FATED TO BE FREE

VOL. I.

# FATED TO BE FREE

By JEAN INGELOW

AUTHOR OF "OFF THE SKELLIGS," ETC., ETC.

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## CHAPTER I.

### A WATCHER OF LILIES.

"Unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid."—*Collect, English Communion Service.*

IN one of the south-western counties of England, some years ago, and in a deep, well-wooded valley where men made perry and cider, wandered little and read less, there was a hamlet with neither farm nor cottage in it, that had not stood two hundred and fifty years, and just beyond there was a church nearly double that age, and there were the mighty wrecks of two great oak-trees, said to be more ancient still.

Between them, winding like a long red rut, went the narrow road, and was so deeply cut into the soil that a horseman passing down it could see nothing of its bordering fields; but about fifty yards from the first great oak the land suddenly dipped, and showed on the left a steep cup-like glen, choked with trees, and

only divided from the road by a few dilapidated stakes and palings, and a wooden gate, orange with the rust of lichens, and held together with ropes and bands.

A carriage-drive was visible on the other side of the gate, but its boundaries were half obliterated by the grass and weeds that had grown over it, and as it wound down into the glen it was lost among the trees. Nature, before it has been touched by man, is almost always beautiful, strong, and cheerful in man's eyes; but nature, when he has once given it his culture and then forsaken it, has usually an air of sorrow and helplessness. He has made it live the more by laying his hand upon it, and touching it with his life. It has come to relish of his humanity, and it is so flavoured with his thoughts, and ordered and permeated by his spirit, that if the stimulus of his presence is withdrawn it cannot for a long while do without him, and live for itself as fully and as well as it did before.

There was nothing to prevent a stranger from entering this place, and if he did so, its meaning very soon took hold of him; he perceived that he had walked into the world of some who were courting oblivion, steeping themselves in solitude, tempting

their very woods to encroach upon them, and so swathe them as in a mantle of secrecy which might cover their misfortunes, and win forgetfulness both for their faults and for their decline.

The glen was about three hundred yards across, and the trees which crowded it, and overflowed its steep side encroaching over the flat ground beyond, were chiefly maples and sycamores. Every sunbeam that shot in served to show its desolation. The place was encumbered with fallen branches, tangled brushwood, dead ferns; and wherever the little stream had spread itself there was a boggy hollow, rank with bulrushes, and glorious with the starry marsh marigold. But here and there dead trees stood upright, gaunt and white in their places, great swathes of bark hanging loose from their limbs, while crowds of young saplings, sickly for want of space and light, thrust up their heads towards the sunshine, and were tied together and cumbered in their struggle by climbing ropes of ivy, and long banners of the wild black vine.

The ring of woodland was not deep, the domain was soon traversed, and then stepping out into a space covered with rank meadow grass, one might see the house which should have been its heart.

It was a wide, old, red brick mansion, with many irregular windows, no pane in which was more than two inches square. One end of it was deeply embedded in an orchard of pear and apple trees, but its front was exposed, and over the door might be seen the date of its building. The roof was high and sloping, and in its centre rose a hugh stack of brick chimneys, which had almost the effect of a tower, while under the eaves, at regular intervals, were thrust out grotesque heads, with short spouts protruding from their mouths. Some of these had fallen on the paving-flags below, and no one had taken them up. No one ever looked out of those front windows, or appeared to notice how fast the fruit-trees by the house, and the forest-trees from the glen, were reaching out their arms and sending forth their young saplings towards it, as if to close it in and swallow it up.

So still it looked with its closed shutters, that what slight evidence there was of its really being inhabited appeared only to make it yet more strange and alone; for these were a gaunt, feeble, old dog, who paced up and down the flags as if keeping guard, and a brass handle on the oaken door, which

was so highly polished that it glittered and shone in the light.

But there was a great deal of life and company up aloft, for a tribe of blue pigeons had their home among those eaves and chimneys, and they walked daintily up the steep roof with their small red feet, while they uttered their plaintive call to their young.

It was a strange fancy that prompted the cleaning of this door-handle. "I mun keep it bright," the old woman would say who did it, "in case anybody should come to call." No one but herself ever opened the door, nobody within cared that she should bestow this trouble. Nobody, for more than fifty years, ever had "come to call," and yet, partly because the feigning of such a possibility seemed to connect her still with her fellows of the work-a-day world, and partly because the young master, her foster-brother, whom she deeply loved, had last been seen by her with this door-handle in his hand, she faithfully continued every day to begin her light tasks by rubbing it, and while so doing she would often call to mind the early spring twilight she had opened her eyes in so long ago, and heard creaking footsteps passing down the stairs; and then how she had heard

the great bolt of the door withdrawn, and had sprung out of bed, and peering through her casement had seen him close it after him, and with his young brother steal away among the ghostly white pear-trees, never to return.

"And I didn't give it a thought that they could be after aught worse than rook-shooting," she would murmur, "for all I heard a sort of a sobbing on the stairs. It was hard on poor old Madam though, never to take any leave of her; but all her life has been hard for that matter, poor innocent old critter. Well, well, I hope it's not a sin to wish 'em happy, spite of that bad action; and as for her, she's had her troubles in this world, as all the parish is ready to testify, and no doubt but what that will be considered to her in the world to come."

All the parish was always ready to testify that poor old Madam had had a sight o' troubles. All the parish took a certain awful pleasure in relating them; it was a sort of distinction to have among them such an unfortunate woman and mother, so that the very shepherds' and ditchers' wives plumed themselves upon it over those in the next parish, where the old Squire and his wife had never lost one of their many

children, or had any trouble "to speak of." "For there was no call to count his eldest son's running off with a dairymaid, it being well beknown," they would observe with severity, "that his mother never would let e'er a one of the young madams as were suitable to marry him come nigh the house."

The dairymaid belonged to their parish, and so afforded them another ground of triumph over their rivals. "Besides," they would say, "wasn't their own church parson—old parson Green that everybody swore by—wasn't he distinctly heard to say to the young man's father, 'that he might ha' been expected to do wus'? They didn't see, for their parts, that aught but good had come of it neither; but as for poor old Madam, anybody might see that no good ever came nigh her. We must submit ourselves to the Almighty's will," they would add with reverence. They couldn't tell why He had afflicted her, but they prayed Him to be merciful to her in her latter end.

It was in old parson Green's time, the man they all swore by, that they talked thus; but when parson Craik came, they learned some new words, and instead of accepting trouble with the religious acquiescence of the ignorant, they began to wonder and

doubt, and presently to offend their rivals by their fine language. "Mysterious, indeed," they would say, "is the ways of Providence."

In the meantime the poor old woman who for so many years was the object of their speculations and their sympathy, lived in all quietness and humbleness at one end of her long house, and on fine Sundays edified the congregation by coming to church. Not however, on foot; her great age made that too much an exertion for her. She was drawn by her one old man-servant in a chair on wheels, her granddaughter and her grandson's widow walking beside her, and her little great-grandson, Peter, who was supposed to be her heir, bringing up the rear.

Old Madam Melcombe, as the villagers called her. She had a large frame, but it was a good deal bowed down; her face was wrinkled, and her blue eyes had the peculiar dimness of extreme old age, yet those who noticed her closely might detect a remarkable shrewdness in her face; her faculties were not only perfect, but she loved to save money, and still retained a high value for, and a firm grip of, her possessions. The land she left waste was, notwithstanding, precious to her. She had tied up her gate

that her old friends might understand, after her eldest son's death, that she could not be tortured by their presence and their sympathy; but she was known sometimes by her grand-daughters to enlarge on the goodness of the land thereabouts, and to express a hope that when Peter's guardians came into power, they would bring it under the plough again. She went to church by a little footpath, and always conducted herself with great decorum, though, twice or thrice during the reading of the lessons, she had startled the congregation by standing up with a scared expression of countenance, and looking about her while she leaned on her high staff as if she thought some one had called her; but she was in her ninety-fifth year, and this circumstance, together with the love and pity felt for her, would easily have excused far greater eccentricities.

She had felt very keenly the desertion of her second and her fourth sons, who had run away from home when the elder was barely eighteen, and without previous quarrel or unkindness so far as was known; nor was it believed that they had ever come to see her since, or sought her forgiveness. Her eldest son, while still in the flower of his age, had

died by his own hand; her youngest son had died in the West Indies, of fever; and the third, the only one who remained with her, had never been either a comfort or a credit to his family: he had but lately died, leaving a son and a daughter. Of these, the daughter was with her grandmother, and the son was just dead, having left an only child, his heir.

At one end of the house, as had been said, was an orchard, at the other was a large garden. If the desolate appearance of the house was likely to raise oppressive feelings in a stranger's mind, how much more this garden! It was a large oblong piece of ground, the walls of which enclosed the western end of the house completely. One of them ran parallel with the front, and a massive oaken door somewhat relieved its flat monotony; but this door afforded no ingress, it was bolted and barred from within.

The garden was that special portion of her inheritance on which the ancient owner rested her eyes; morning, noon, and evening she would sit gazing on its green fishpond, all overgrown with duckweed, on the lawn now fast being encroached on by shrubbery, and on the bed of lilies which from year to year spread and flourished.

But she never entered it, nor did any one else.

That end of the house had but four windows on the ground floor, and these were all strongly barred with iron, the places they lighted consisting of kitchen, offices, and a cider store-room. Above these on the first-floor were three pleasant rooms overlooking the garden, and opening on to a wooden gallery or verandah, at each end of which was an alcove of an old-fashioned and substantial description.

The gallery was roofed above, had a heavy oaken balustrade, and being fully ten feet wide afforded a convenient place in which the lonely old lady could take exercise, for, excepting on Sunday, she was scarcely ever known to leave her own premises. There also her little great-grandson Peter first learned to walk, and as she slowly passed from one alcove to the other, resting in each when she reached it, he would take hold of her high staff and totter beside her, always bestowing on her as much as he could of his company, and early showing a preference for her over his aunt and even over his mother.

Up and down the gallery this strange pair would move together, and as she went she gazed frequently over the gay wilderness below, and if she sat long in

one of the alcoves, she would peer out at its little window always on the same scene; a scene in the winter of hopeless neglect and desolation. Dead leaves, dead dry stalks of foxgloves and mullens, broken branches, and an arbour with trellised roof, borne down by the weight of the vine.

But in spring and summer the place was gorgeous in parts with a confused tangle of plants and shrubs in flower. Persian lilacs, syringas, labernums made thickets here and there and covered their heads with bloom. Passion flowers trailed their long tendrils all over the gallery, and masses of snow-white clematis towered in many of the trees.

All distinction between pathway and border had long since been obliterated, the eyes wandered over a carpet of starred and spangled greenery. Tall white gladiolas shot up above it, and spires of foxgloves and rockets, while all about them and among the rose-trees climbed the morning glory and the briony vine.

Stretching in front of the ruined arbour was a lawn, and along one edge of it under the wall, grew a bed of lilies, lilies of the valley, so sweet in their season, that sometimes the old lady's grand-daughters

would affirm that a waft of their breath had reached them as they sat up in the gallery at work.

It was towards this spot that Madam Melcombe looked. Here her unquiet face was frequently turned, from her first early entrance into the gallery, till sunset, when she would sit in one of the alcoves in hot weather. She gave no reason for this watch, but a kindly and reverent reserve protected her from questions. It was felt that the place was sacred to some recollection of her youth, when her young children were about her, before the cruel desertion of two, the ceaseless quarrels of other two, and the tragic death of one of them, had darkened her days.

The one door in the wall being fastened, and the ground-floor at that end of the house having none but barred windows, it follows that the only entrance to the garden was now from this gallery. There was, indeed, a flight of steps leading down from it, but there was a gate at the top of them, and this gate was locked.

On the day of her eldest son's funeral, his stricken mother had locked it. Perhaps she scarcely knew at first that the time would never come when she should

find courage again to open it; but she took away the key to satisfy some present distressful fancy, and those about her respected her desire that the place should not be entered. They did not doubt that there was some pathetic reason for this desire, but none was evident, for her son had gone down to his death in a secluded and now all but inaccessible part of the glen, where, turning from its first direction, it sunk deeper still, and was divided by red rocks from its more shallow opening.

A useless watch at best was hers, still of the terrace, and the arbour, and the bed of lilies; but as she got yet deeper down into the vale of years, those about her sometimes hoped that she had forgotten the sorrowful reason, whatever it might be, that drew her eyes incessantly towards them. She began even to express a kind of pleasure in the gradual encroachments of the lovely plants. Once she had said, "It is my hope, when I am gone, as none of you will ever disturb them."

Whatever visions of a happy youth, whatever mournful recollections of the sports of her own children, might belong to them, those now with her knew not of them, but they thought that her long and

pathetic watch had at last become more a habit with her than any conscious recalling of the past, and they hoped it might be so.

The one sitting-room used by the family opened into the gallery, and was a good deal darkened by its roof. On one side of it was Peter's nursery, on the other his great-grandmother's chamber, and no other part of the house was open excepting some kitchen offices, and two or three bedrooms in the roof. The servants consisted of a nurse (herself an old woman), who sat nearly all day in the parlour, because her far more aged mistress required much attendance, a grey-headed housemaid, a cook, and a man, the husband of this last. His chief business was to groom the one horse of the establishment, and ride on it to the nearest town for meat, grocery, and other marketings.

The floor of the parlour was oak, which had once been polished; all the furniture was to the last degree quaint and old fashioned; the two large windows opened like double doors upon the gallery, and were shaded by curtains of Madras chintz. The chairs, which were inconveniently heavy, were also covered with chintz; it was frilled round them like a petticoat, and was just short enough to show their hideous

club-feet. Over the chimney-piece was a frame, and something in it said to be a picture. Peter, when a very little child, used to call it "a picture of the dark," for it seemed to be nothing but an expanse of deep brown, with a spot of some lighter hue in one corner. He wished, he said, that they had put a piece of moon in to show how dark that country was. The old nurse, however, had her theories about this patch; she would have it that it was somewhat in the shape of a jacket; she thought it likely that the picture represented a hunt, and said she supposed the foremost horseman in his red coat was watering his horse in a pond. Peter and the nurse had argued together on this subject many times before the old lady was appealed to, but when they once chanced to ask her about the picture, she affirmed that the patch was a lobster, and that a sort of ring which seemed faintly to encircle it was the edge of a plate. In short, she declared that this was a Dutch picture of still life, and that in Peter's time, when he came to have it cleaned, it would prove to be worth money.

"And when will it be my time?" asked little Peter innocently.

"Hold your tongue, child!" whispered his mother; "it won't be your time till your poor dear grandmother's in heaven."

"I don't want her to go to heaven yet," said Peter in a plaintive tone (for he regarded her as much the best possession he had), and, raising his voice, he complained to her as to one threatening to injure him, "Grandmother, you don't want to go to heaven just yet, do you?"

"Lor bless the child!" exclaimed old Madam Melcombe, a good deal startled.

"No, don't," continued Peter in a persuasive tone; "stop here, but let me clean the picture, because I want to see that lobster."

"Now I tell you what," answered his great-grandmother rather sharply, "if you was to go and play in the gallery, it would be a deal better than arguing with me." So Peter departed to his play, and forgot the lobster for a little while.

But Peter was not destined that evening to please his great-grandmother, for he had no sooner got well into the spirit of his play in the gallery than he began to sing. "I'm a coward at songs," she would sometimes say; "and if it wasn't for the

dear birds, I could wish there was no music in the world."

Her feeling was the same which has been beautifully described by Gassendi, who, writing in Latin, expresses himself thus :—

"He preferred also the music of birds to the human voice or to musical instruments, not because he derived no pleasure from these last, but because, after hearing music from the human voice, there remained a certain sustained agitation, disturbing attention and sleep; while the risings and fallings, the tones and changes and sounds and concords, pass and repass through the fancy; whereas nothing of the sort can be left after the warbling of birds, who, as they are not open to our imitation, cannot move the faculty of imagination within us." (Gassendi, in *Vita Peireskii.*)

In the garden was plenty of music of the sort that Madam Melcombe still loved. Peter could not shout in his play without disturbing the storm-cock as he sat up aloft singing a love-song to his wife. As for the little birds, blackcaps haunted almost every bush, and the timid white-throat brooded there in peace over her half-transparent eggs.

So no one ever sang in old Madam Melcombe's presence unless Peter forgot himself, and vexed his mother by chanting out snatches of songs that he had caught up from the village children. Mrs. Peter Melcombe formed for herself few theories; she was a woman dull of feeling and slow of thought; she knew as a fact that her aged relative could not bear music. So, as a matter of duty and self-interest, she stopped her child's little voice when she could, and if he asked, "Why does grandmother cry when I sing?" she would answer, "Nobody knows," for she had not reflected how those to whom music is always welcome must have neither an empty heart nor a remorseful conscience, nor keen recollections, nor a foreboding soul.

Peter was a good little boy enough; he was tolerably well tamed by the constant presence of old age and, with the restraints it brought upon him, and having less imagination than falls to the lot of most children, he was the more affected by his position. When he strayed into a field of wheat, and there was waving and whispering above his head, it was not all one to him, as if he had been lost in some old-world forest, where uncouth creatures dwelt,

and castles and caverns might be encountered before the stile. He could not see the great world out of the parlour window, and understand and almost inherit another world beyond the hills; as to the moon, the child's silver heaven, he never saw something marvellous and mild sitting up there and smiling to him to come.

But he was happy, and instead of the wide-open eyes of a child fed to the full with the wonders about him and within him, his eyes were shaded constantly by their light lashes; he enjoyed his play, but he blinked when day was at the full; and all his observations concerned realities. Some story had reached him about a ghost which had been seen in that immediate neighbourhood.

"Who cooks his dinner for him?" inquired the child.

"He has no dinner," answered the old housemaid.

"I don't want to see him, then," said the little winking, blinking philosopher; "he might ask me for some of mine."

But that was a height of prudence that he could not reach often, and he several times annoyed his mother and alarmed his aunt by asking questions about this ghost.

Laura Melcombe, Peter's aunt, acted as his governess, and took a certain pride and pleasure in his young intelligence. It was well that she had something real to interest her, for her character was in strong contrast to her nephew's. She lived mainly in an ideal world, and her life was fed by what she fetched up from the clod or down from the clouds. Chiefly by the former. She was "of imagination all compact;" but that is a very unlucky case where there is weak judgment, little or no keenness of observation, a treacherous memory, and a boundless longing for the good things of life. Of all gifts, imagination, being the greatest, is least worth having, unless it is well backed either by moral culture or by other intellectual qualities. It is the crown of all thoughts and powers; but you cannot wear a crown becomingly if you have no head (worth mentioning) to put it on.

Miss Laura Melcombe thought most of the young farmers in the neighbourhood were in love with her. Accordingly, at church or at the market-town, where she occasionally went on shopping expeditions, she gave herself such airs as she considered suitable for a lady who must gently, though graciously, repel all

hopeless aspirations. She was one of those people to whom a compliment is absolute poison. The first man who casually chanced to say something to her in her early youth, which announced to her that he thought her lovely, changed her thoughts about herself for ever after. First, she accepted his compliment as his sincere and fervent conviction. Secondly, she never doubted that he expressed his continuous belief, not his feeling of the moment. Thirdly, she regarded beauty in her case as thenceforward an established fact, and not this one man's opinion. Fourthly, she spent some restless months in persuading herself that to admire must needs be to love, and she longed in vain to see him "come forward." Then some other casual acquaintance paid her a compliment, and she went through the same experience on his account, persuading herself that her first admirer could not afford to marry; and this state of things had now gone on for several years.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE LESSON.

"Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell, think ye . . . ."

MANY and many an hour had Peter spent, when he was a very little boy, in gazing through the heavy banister-like railings of the gallery; and, as he grew older, in pensively leaning upon them, and longing in vain to get into the forbidden Paradise of the garden. The gallery floor being about twelve feet from the ground he could see the whole place from it. Oh the stores of nests that it must contain! the beautiful sharp sticks for arrows! the capital elder shoots, full of pith! how he longed to get at them for making pop-guns! Sometimes, when the pink hawthorns were in flower, or the guelder-roses, he would throw a ball at one of them just to see what showers of bloom would come down; and then what a commotion such an event would make among

the birds! what chattering and chirping, and screaming and fluttering! But the experiment was rather a costly one, for the ball once thrown there was no getting it back again, it must lie and rot till the seams burst open, and birds picked the wool out for their nests.

Sometimes Peter would get a hook tied to the end of a long string, and amuse himself with what he called fishing, that is to say, he would throw out his line, and try to get it tangled in the slight branches of some shrub, and draw it up, with a few of the flowers attached; but with all his fishing he never got up anything worth having: the utmost being a torn cabbage-rose, and two or three shattered peonies, leaf and root and all.

It is melancholy to think how much valuable property was engulphed in this untrodden waste, how many shuttlecocks, hit a little too hard, had toppled over and settled on some flowery clump, in full view of, but out of reach for ever of their unfortunate possessor; how many marbles had bounded over and leaped into the green abyss; how many bits of slate-pencil, humming-tops, little ships made of walnut-shells, and other most precious articles, had

been lost there to human ken, and now lay hidden and mouldering away!

Sometimes when Peter had lost anything of more than common value, he would complain to his aunt, or his mother, and hint a humble wish that he could get it again. On such occasions his mother would remark, with a languid sigh, that it certainly did seem a pity such a fine piece of land should lie waste; but if Peter followed up the conversation by declaring that he could easily climb over the gate and get down into the garden if he might, he was immediately met by such stern rebukes from all parties, and such fervent assurances that if he ever dared to do such a thing he should certainly be sent to school, that he grew to the age of seven years with two deep impressions on his mind; first, that it would be very wicked to go down into the garden; second, that it would be very dreadful to be sent to school.

One very fine hot day in July Madam Melcombe had caused a table to be set in the gallery, that she might enjoy her early tea in the open air. Peter and the rest of the party were with her, and after a long silence he turned towards her and said, "Grand-

mother, there are no ghosts in our house, are there?"

"Ne'er a one," exclaimed the nurse with zealous promptitude, "they don't come to houses where *good folks live.*"

"I wish they would," said Peter, thoughtfully, "I want to see one."

"What does he say?" asked the great-grandmother. The nurse repeated Peter's audacious remark; whereupon Madam Melcombe said briskly and sharply, "Hold your tongue, child, and eat your bread and milk like a Christian; you're spilling it on the floor."

"But I wish they would," repeated Peter softly; and finishing his bread and milk, he said his grace; and his fishing-rod being near at hand, he leaned his elbows on the balustrade, threw his line, and began to play at his favourite game.

"I think," he said, presently turning to his aunt, "I think, aunt, I shall call the garden the 'field of the cloth of gold;' it's so covered with marigolds just now that it looks quite yellow. Henry's tent shall be the arbour, and I'll have the French king's down in this corner."

On hearing this, his mother slightly elevated her eyebrows, she had no notion what he was alluding to; but his grandmother, who seemed to have been made rather restless and uneasy by his remarks about ghosts, evidently regarded this talk as something more of the same sort, and said to her granddaughter, "I wish, Laura, you wouldn't let him read such a quantity of fairy tales and heathenish nonsense—'field o' the cloth o' gold, indeed!' Who ever heard of such a thing!"

"He has only been reading the 'History of England,' grandmother," said Peter's aunt.

"I hadn't read anything out of that book for such a long time," said Peter; "my Bible-lesson to-day made me remember it. About that other field, you know, grandmother."

"Come, that's something like," said old Madam Melcombe. "Stand up now, and let me hear your Bible-lesson."

"But, grandmother," Peter inquired, "I may call this the 'field of the cloth of gold,' mayn't I?"

"O dear me, call it anything you like," she replied; "but don't stand in that way to say your task to me; put your feet together now, and fold your hands,

and hold your head up. To think that you're the child's aunt, Laura, she continued fretfully, and should take no more heed to his manners. Now you just look straight at me, Peter, and begin."

The child sighed: the constraint of his attitude perhaps made him feel melancholy. He ventured to cast one glance at his fishing-rod, and at the garden, then looking straight at his great-grandmother, he began in a sweet and serious tone of voice to repeat his lesson from the twenty-seventh chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, the third to the tenth verse.

3. "*Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders,*

4. "*Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that.*

5. "*And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself.*

6. "*And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood.*

7. "*And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in.*

8. "*Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood unto this day.*

9. "*Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value,*

10. "*And gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me.*"

What was this!—standing upright again, as she had done several times in the church—was she listening? It scarcely appeared that she was; she took first one hand from her staff, and looked earnestly at it, and then she took the other, and with wide-open eyes examined that also.

"O cruel, cruel," thought Peter's mother, when Peter had repeated a verse or two, "why did not Laura prevent this, she who knew what the child's lesson was?" and she sat cold and trembling, with an anguish of pity; but she felt that now it was too late to stop her boy, he must go on to the end. As to the nurse, she sitting there still, with her work on her knees, felt as if every word rose up and struck

The old fancy; the constant fancy; gazing at the bed of lilies, and talking to herself as, with her trembling hand to her brow, she peered out towards the arbour. They were words of no particular significance that she said; but just as the nurse came back bringing her a cordial, she turned round and repeated them distinctly, and with a solemnity that was almost awful.

"They all helped to dig it; and they know they did."

Words that appeared to be so far from the tragical recollection which must have first caused this disturbance in her poor mind; but her granddaughter thought proper to make her some kind of answer.

"Did they, grandmother?" she said in a soothing tone, "and a very good thing too."

She stopped short, for upon the aged face fell suddenly such a look of affright, such renewed intelligence seemed to peer out of the dim eyes, and such defiance with their scrutiny, that for the moment she was very much alarmed.

"She's not quite herself. Oh, I hope she's not going to have a stroke!" was her thought.

"What have I been a saying?" inquired Madam Melcombe.

"You said it was a good thing they dug the lily bed," answered her grand-daughter.

"And nothing else?"

"No, ma'am, no," answered the nurse; "and if you had, what would it signify?"

Madam Melcombe let them settle her in her chair and give her her cordial, then she said—

"Folks are oft-times known to talk wild in their age. I thought I might be losing my wits; might have said something."

"Dear grandmother, don't laugh!" exclaimed her grandson's widow; "and don't look so strange. Lose your wits! you never will, not you. We shall have you a little longer yet, please God, and bright and sensible to the last."

"Folks are oft-times known to talk wild in their age," repeated Madam Melcombe; and during the rest of that evening she continued silent and lost in thought.

The next morning, after a late breakfast, her family observed that there was still a difference in her manner. She was not quite herself, they thought,

and they were confirmed in their opinion when she demanded of her grand-daughter and her grandson's widow, that a heavy old-fashioned bureau should be opened for her, and that she should be left alone. "I don't know as I shall be spared much longer," said the meek nonogenarian, "and I've made up my mind to write a letter to my sons."

"*My sons!*" When they heard this they were startled almost as they might have been if she had had no sons, for neither of them had ever heard her mention their names. Nothing, in fact, was known concerning them in that house, excepting that what portion of success and happiness had been allotted to the family seemed all to have fallen to their share.

They were vastly unpopular in the hamlet. Not that any but the very old people remembered the day when they had first been missing, or what an extra ordinary effect their behaviour had produced on their mother; but that the new generation had taken up her cause—the new parson also—and that the story being still often told had lost nothing in the narration.

Parson Craik had always been poor old Madam's champion since his coming among them. He had

taken pains to ascertain the facts from the oldest hedger's old wife, and when first he heard her tell how she had opened her door at dawn to let in her husband, during the great gale that was rocking the orchard trees and filling the air with whirls of blossom, that came down like a thick fall of snow, he made an observation which was felt at the time to have an edifying power in it, and which was incorporated with the story ever after. "And when I telled him how the grete stack of chimneys fell not half-an-hour after, over the very place where they had passed, and how they were in such a hurry to be off that they jumped the edge for fear us should stop them or speak to them. Then says Parson Craik to me, sitting as it might be there, and I a sitting opposite (for I'd given him the big chair), says he to me, 'My friend, we must lay our hands on our mouths when we hear of the afflictions of the righteous. And yet man,' says he, 'man, when he hears of such heartless actions, can but feel that it would have been a just judgment on them, if the wind had been ordained in the hauling of those chimneys down, to fling 'em on their undutiful heads.'"

Poor Madam Melcombe, her eldest son, whose

heir she was, had caused the stack of chimneys to be built up again; but she was never the same woman from that day, and she had never seen those sons again (so far as was known), or been reconciled to them. And now she had desired to be left alone, and had expressly said, "I've made up my mind to write a letter to my sons."

So she was left alone and undertook, with trembling hands and dimmed eyes, her unwonted task. She wrote a letter which, if those about her could have seen it, would certainly have affected their feelings, and would perhaps have made them think more highly yet of her meek forgiving nature, for she neither blamed her sons nor reminded them of what they had done; but rather seemed to offer a strange kind of apology for troubling them, and to give a reason for doing so that was stranger still.

THE LETTER.

"SON DANIEL AND SON AUGUSTUS,—This comes from your poor unfortunate mother that has never troubled you these many, many years, and hoping you and your families are better than I am at present, son Daniel and you son Augustus; and my desire is

both of you, that now you will not deny your poor mother to come and see her, but will, on receipt of this, come as soon as may be, for it's about my funeral that I want to speak, and my time is very short, and I was never used to much writing.

"If you don't come, in particular you, son Daniel, you will break your poor mother's heart.

"And so no more at present from her that never said an unkind word to you.

"ELIZABETH MELCOMBE."

This letter was addressed to the elder son, went through the village post-office, and when its direction was seen, such interest was excited and so much curiosity, that half the women in the hamlet had been allowed to take a look at its cover before it was sent away.

Perhaps Madam Melcombe herself, when she sat expecting these long-lost sons to appear, was scarcely more agitated or more excited than were the people in that sequestered place. A good many cottagers were hanging about or looking out of the windows when they alighted, and going into the small inn called for spirits and water. It was known outside

at once what they had asked for. No wonder they wanted some Dutch courage to take them into her presence, was the general thought.

Several little boys had gathered in front of the door longing, and yet dreading, to get a sight of them. Some inhabitants would have liked to hiss, but lacked unanimity or courage, nobody wanted to begin. Some would have liked to speak, but had not considered beforehand what to say.

The brothers came out, the children fell back; but one little fellow, a child five years old, with a sort of holy necessity upon him (as was supposed) to give his testimony, threw a very little bit of soft dirt at the legs of one of them.

This action was not noticed; and before the other little urchins had found time for aught more fruitful than regret that they had not done likewise, the gentlemen got into their post-chaise, and were driven to the old mansion.

And their mother?

She was quite alone, sitting in all state and expectation, in one of the alcoves, while the deep shadow of the house fell distinct and well defined over the wilderness of a garden.

Her senses were more acute than usual. She was grasping her long staff, and already wearying for them, when she heard the sound of wheels, and presently after a foot in her parlour, and the nurse appeared with two cards on a tray.

Mr. Mortimer, Mr. Augustus Mortimer. This formal introduction flurried Madam Melcombe a little. "The gentlemen are coming," the nurse almost whispered; and then she withdrew, and shutting the glass-doors behind her, left this mother to meet with these sons.

Whatever anxiety, whatever sensations of maternal affection might have been stirring within her, it is certain that her first feeling was one of intense surprise. The well-remembered faces that she had cherished now for much more than half a century —the tall, beautiful youth—the fine boy, almost a child, that had gone off with him, could they be now before her? She was not at all oblivious of the flight of time; she did not forget that the eldest of these sons was scarcely nineteen years younger than herself; yet she had made no defined picture of their present faces in her mind, and it was not without a troubled sense of wonder that she rose and

saw coming on towards her two majestic old men, with hair as white as snow.

Her first words were simple and hesitating. She immediately knew them from one another.

"Son Dan'el," she said, turning to the taller, "I expect this is you;" and she shifted her staff to her left hand while he took the right; and then the other old man, coming up, stooped, and kissed her on the forehead.

Madam Melcombe shed a few tears. Both her sons looked disturbed, and very ill at ease. She sat down again, and they sat opposite to her. Then there was such a long, awkward pause, and her poor hand trembled so much, that at last, as if in order to give her time to feel more at ease, her younger son began to talk to her of her grand-daughter who lived with her, and of her little great-grandson, Peter Melcombe. He hoped, he said with gravity, that they were well.

There seemed to be nothing else that either of them could think of to say; and presently, helped by the rest their words gave her, Madam Melcombe recovered her self-possession.

"Son Dan'el," she said, "my time must be short

now; and I have sent for you and your brother to ask a favour of you. I could not lie easy in my grave," she continued, "if I thought there would be nobody of all my children to *follow me.* I have none but poor Peter's daughter and grandson here now, and I hope you and Augustus and your sons will come to my funeral. I hope you'll promise me faithfully, both of you, that you'll certainly come and follow me to the grave."

A silence followed. The disappointment of both the sons was evident.

They had hoped, the younger remarked, that she might have had something else to say.

No, she had not, she answered. Where would be the good of that? They had written to her often enough about that.

And then she went on to repeat her request. There was nothing she would not do for them, nothing, if they would but promise to come.

"So be it," replied the elder; "but then, you must make me a promise, mother, in your turn."

"It isn't the land?" she inquired with humble hesitation. "I should be agreeable to that."

"No, God forbid! What you have to promise

me is, that if I come to your funeral, you will make such a will that not one acre of the land or one shilling you possess shall ever come to me or mine."

"And," said the other promptly, "I make the same promise, on the same condition."

Then there was another pause, deeper and more intense than the first. The old mother's face passed through many changes, always with an air of cogitation and trouble; and the old sons watched her in such a suspense of all movement, that it seemed as if they scarcely breathed.

"You sent your cards in," she said as if with sudden recollection, "to remind me that you'd kept your father's name?"

"Nothing will ever induce either of us to change it," was the answer.

"You're very hard on me, son Dan'el," she said at last; "for you know you was always my favourite son."

A touching thing to say to such an old man; but there was no reply.

"And I never took any pride in Peter," she continued, "he was that undutiful; and his grandson's a mere child."

Still no reply.

"I was in hopes, if I could get speech of you, I should find you'd got reasonable with age, Dan'el; for God knows you was as innocent of it as the babe unborn."

Old Daniel Mortimer sighed deeply. They had been parted nearly sixty years, but their last words and their first words had been on the same subject; and it was as fresh in the minds of both as if only a few days had intervened between them. Still it seemed he could find nothing to say, and she, rousing up, cried out passionately,—

"Would you have had me denounce my own flesh and blood?"

"No, madam, no," answered the younger.

She noticed the different appellation instantly, and turning on him, said, with vigour and asperity,—

"And you, Augustus, that I hear is rich, and has settled all your daughters well, and got a son of your own, *you* might know a parent's feelings. It's ill done of you to encourage Dan'el in his obstinacy."

Then, seeing that her words did not produce the slightest effect, she threw her lace apron over her head, and pressing her wrinkled hands against her face, gave way to silent tears.

"I'm a poor miserable old woman," she presently cried; "and if there's to be nobody but that child and the tenants to follow me to the grave, it'll be the death of me to know it, I'm sure it will."

With an air of indescribable depression, the elder son then repeated the same promise he had given before, and added the same condition.

The younger followed his example, and thereupon humbly taking down the lace from her face, and mechanically smoothing it over her aged knees, she gave the promise required of her, and placed her hand on a prayer-book which was lying on the small table beside her, as if to add emphasis and solemnity to her words.

## CHAPTER III.

### GOLD, THE INCORRUPTIBLE WITNESS.

Accipe Hoc.

AFTER she had received the promise she desired from her sons—a promise burdened with so strange a condition—Madam Melcombe seemed to lose all the keenness and energy she had displayed at first.

She had desired above all things that honour should be shown to her in her death; her mind often occupied itself with strange interest and pertinacity on the details of her funeral. All her wishes respecting it had long been known to her granddaughters, but her eldest surviving son had never been mentioned by name to them. She always spoke of him as "the chief mourner."

Suddenly, however, it appeared to have occurred to her that he might not be present at it, after all.

Everything must be risked to ascertain this. She must write, she must entreat his presence. But when he and his brother sent in their cards she, for the first time in her life, perceived that all she had done was useless. She saw the whole meaning of the situation; for this estate had come to her through the failure of heirs male to her father, and it was the provision of his will that she and her heirs should take back his name—the name of Melcombe.

She knew well that these two sons had always retained their father's name; but when they sent it in to her, she instinctively perceived their meaning. They were calling her attention to the fact, and she was sure now that they never meant to change it.

She had not behaved kindly or justly to her grandson's widow, for people had called little Peter her heir, and she had not contradicted them. But she had never made a will; and she secretly hoped that at the last something would occur to prevent her doing so.

Everything was absolutely in her own power, to leave as she pleased; but a half superstitious feeling prompted her to wait. She wished her eldest surviving son to inherit the estate; but sad reflection

seemed to assure her that if it simply lapsed to him as heir-at-law, he would think that next thing to receiving it through a dispensation of Providence; and she was such an unhappy mother, that she had reason to suppose he might prefer that to a direct bequest from her. So she left the kindly women who shared her seclusion entirely unprovided for, and the long services of her old domestics unrewarded, in order to flatter the supposed prejudices of this unknown son, who was destined now to show her how little he cared for all her forethought, and all her respect for his possible wishes.

This was now over. She felt that she was foiled. She sat, leaning her chin on the top of her staff, not able to find anything more to say; and every moment they spent together, the mother and sons became more painfully embarrassed, more restless and more restrained.

In the meanwhile Peter's mother and aunt, just as unconscious that his heirship had ever been a doubt, as that it had been secured to him then and there, sat waiting below, dressed in their best, to receive these visitors, and press them to partake of a handsome collation that had been prepared

by their mother's order, and was now spread for them with unwonted state and profusion in the best parlour.

This large room had not been used for forty years; but as it was always kept with closed shutters, excepting on those days when it received a thorough and careful cleaning, the furniture was less faded than might have been expected, and the old leather-backed chairs, ebony cabinets, and quaint mirrors leaning out from the walls, looked almost as fresh as ever.

"Only let me get speech of them," the mother had thought, "and all may yet come right between us; for it's a long time ago, a weary while since we parted, and they ought to find it easier to forget than I do!" Then she had charged her grand-daughter, when the lunch was ready, to ring a bell, and she would send them down. "Or even, mayhap, I may come down myself," she had added, "leaning on the arm of my son."

So the bell was rung, and Laura and Mrs. Peter Melcombe waited for the grandmother and her guests with no little trepidation.

They had not intended to be cordial. Their notion

of their own part in this interview was that they should be able to show a certain courteous coldness, a certain calm gravity in their demeanour towards these two uncles, but neither of them knew much of the world or of herself. They no sooner saw the majestic old men come in without their mother than Laura, feeling herself blush down to her very finger tips, retreated into the background, and Mrs. Peter Melcombe, suddenly finding that she had forgotten what she had intended to say, could scarcely collect enough composure to answer the gentle courtesy of their rather distant greeting.

A sort of urban polish struck her country sense, making her feel at once that she was a rustic, and that they belonged to a wider and more cultivated world. She felt herself at a disadvantage, and was angry with herself that it should be so, in that house of all places in the world, where she had every right to hold up her head, and they had surely reason to be ashamed of themselves.

Peter was the only person present who was at ease; the unwonted joy of finding himself in the "great parlour" had excited him. He had been wandering about examining the china vases and

admiring the little rainbows which sunshine struck out from the cut-glass borders of the mirrors.

He was very well pleased to include the two great-uncles among the new and interesting objects about him. He came up when called by one of them, answered a few simple questions with childlike docility, and made his mother more sure than before that these dignified old men were treating him, her sister-in-law, and herself, with a certain pathetic gentleness that was almost condescension.

Indeed, both the ladies perceived this, but they also saw that they could not play the part their old relation had assigned to them. Such a handsome collation as it was too, but each, after accepting a biscuit and a glass of cider (the very finest cider and more than ten years old), rose as if to take leave. One patted Peter on the head, and the other ordered the chaise. Neither Laura nor Mrs. Peter Melcombe could find courage to press them to eat, though their secluded lives and old-fashioned manners would have made them quite capable of doing so if they had felt at ease. They looked at one another as the two grand old men withdrew, and their first words were of the disappointment the grandmother would feel

when she heard that they had hardly eaten anything at all.

Madam Melcombe, however, asked no questions. She was found by them when Mr. Mortimer and his brother had withdrawn sitting in her favourite alcove with her chin resting upon her staff. She was deep in thought, and excepting that she watched the chaise drearily as it wound down among the apple and pear trees and was lost to sight, she did not appear to be thinking of her sons. Nor did she mention them again, excepting with reference to her funeral.

"He's a fine man," she remarked in a querulous tone; "he'll look grand in his cloak and scarf when he stands over my grave with his hat off; and I think (though Dan'el, you understand, is to be chief-mourner) that he and his brother had better follow me side by side, and their two sons after them."

How little Laura and Mrs. Peter Melcombe had ever thought about these old men, or supposed that they were frequently present to the mother's mind. And yet now there seemed to be evidence that this was the case.

Two or three guarded questions asked the next day brought answers which showed her to be better

acquainted with their circumstances than she commonly admitted. She had always possessed a portrait in oils of her son Daniel. It had been painted before he left home, and kept him always living as a beautiful fair-haired youth in her recollection. She took pains to acquaint herself with his affairs, though she never opened her lips concerning them to those about her.

His first marriage had been disastrous. His wife had deserted him, leaving him with one child only, a daughter. Upon the death of this poor woman many years afterwards, he had married a widow whose third husband he was, yet who was still young, scarcely so old as his daughter.

Concerning this lady and her children the poor old mother-in-law continually cogitated, having a common little photographic likeness of her in which she tried to find the wifely love and contentment and all the other endearing qualities she had heard of. For at rare intervals one or other of her sons would write to her, and then she always perceived that the second Mrs. Daniel Mortimer made her husband happy. She would be told from time to time that he was much attached to young Brandon, the son of her first

marriage, and that from her three daughters by her second marriage he constantly received the love and deference due to a father.

But this cherished wife had now died also, and had left Daniel Mortimer with one son, a fine youth already past childhood.

Old Madam Melcombe's heart went into mourning for her daughter-in-law whom she had never seen. None but the husband, whose idol she was, lamented her longer and more. Only fifty miles off, but so remote in her seclusion, so shut away, so forgotten; perhaps Mrs. Daniel Mortimer did not think once in a season of her husband's mother; but every day the old woman had thought of her as a consoler and a delight, and when her favourite son retired she soon took out the photograph again and looked sadly at those features that he had held so dear.

But she did not speak much of either son, only repeating from time to time, "He's a fine man; they're fine men, both of them. They'll look grand in their scarves and cloaks at my funeral."

It was not ordained, however, that the funeral should take place yet awhile.

The summer flushed into autumn, then the apples

and pears dropped and were wasted in the garden, even the red-streak apples, that in all the cider country are so highly prized. Then snow came and covered all.

Madam Melcombe had been heard to say that she liked her garden best in winter. She could wish to leave it for good when it was lapped up under a thick fall of snow. Yet she saw the snow melt again and the leaves break forth, and at last she saw the first pale-green spires shoot up out of the bed of lilies.

But the longest life must end at last, the best little boys will sometimes be disobedient.

It appears strange to put these things together; but if they had anything to do with one another, Peter did not know it.

He knew and felt one day that he had been a naughty boy, very naughty, for in fact he had got down into the garden, but he also knew that he had not found the top he went to look for, and that his grandmother had taken from him what he did find.

This punishment he deserved; he had it and no other. It came about in this wise.

It was a sweet April day, almost the last of the month. All the cherry-trees were in full flower; the pear-trees were coming out, and the young thickets in the garden were bending low with lilac-blossom, but Peter was miserable.

He was leaning his arms over the balustrade, and the great red peonies and loose anemones were staring up at him so that he could see down into their central folds; but what is April, and what is a half-holiday, and what indeed is life itself when one has lost perhaps the most excellent top that boy ever spun, and the loudest hummer? And then he had taken such care of it. Never but once, only this once, had he spun it in the gallery at all, and yet this once of all misfortunes it had rolled its last circle out so far that the balustrade had struck it, and in the leap of its rebound it had sprung over.

At first he felt as if he should like to cry. Then a wild and daring thought came and shook at the very doors of his heart. What if he climbed over the gate and got down, and, finding his top, brought it up so quickly that no one would ever know?

His mother and aunt were gone out for a walk; his great-grandmother and the nurse were nodding

one on each side of the fire. It was only three o'clock, and yet they had dined, and they were never known to rouse themselves up for at least half an hour at that time of day.

He took one turn along the gallery again, peeped in at the parlour window, then in a great hurry he yielded to the temptation, climbed over the wooden gate, got down the rotten old steps, and in two minutes was up to his neck in a mass of tangled blossoms. Then he began to feel that passion of deep delight which is born of adventure and curiosity. He quite forgot his top: indeed, there was no chance of finding it. He began to wade about, and got deeper and deeper in. Sometimes quite over-canopied, he burrowed his way half smothered with flowers; sometimes emerging, he cast back a stealthy glance to the gallery.

At last he had passed across the lawn, arrived almost at the very end of the garden, and down among the broken trellis-work of the arbour three nests of the yellow-hammer were visible at the same time. He did not know which to lay hands on first. He thought he had never been so happy in his life, or so much afraid.

But time pressed. He knew now that he should certainly climb over that gate again, though for the present he did not dare to stay; and stooping, almost creeping, over the open lawn and the bed of lilies, he began to work his way homeward by the wall, and through old borders where the thickest trees and shrubs had always grown.

At last, after pushing on for a little distance, he paused to rest in a clump of fir-trees, one of which had been dead for so many years that all its twigs and smaller boughs had decayed and dropped to the ground. Only the large branches, gaunt and skeleton-like, were left standing, and in a fork between two of these and quite within his reach, in a lump of soft felt, or perhaps beaver, he noticed something that glittered. Peter drew it away from the soft material it was lying among, and looked at it. It was a sort of gold band—perhaps it was gold lace, for it was flexible—he had often heard of gold lace, but had not seen any. As he drew it away something else that depended from a morsel of the lump of rag fell away from it, and dropped at his feet. It might have been some sort of badge or ornament, but it was not perfect, though it still glittered, for it had threads of

gold wrought in it. "This is almost in the shape of an anchor," said Peter, as he wrapped the gold band round it, "and I think it must have been lost here for ages; perhaps ever since that old uncle Mortimer that I saw was a little boy."

So then with the piece of gold band wrapped round his hand he began to press on, and if he had not stopped to mark the places where two or three more nests were, he would have been quicker still.

On and on, how dangerously delightful his adventure had been! What would become of him if he could not get down to-morrow?

On and on, his heart beat with exultation; he was close to the steps and he had not been discovered; he was close to the top of them and had not been discovered; he was just about to climb over when he heard a cry that rang in his ears long after, a sharp, piercing cry, and turning he saw his great-grandmother in her cloak and hood standing in the entrance of the alcove, and reaching out her hands as if she wanted to come and meet him, but could not stir.

"Peter! Peter! Peter!" she cried, and her voice seemed to echo all over the place.

Peter tumbled over the gate as fast as he possibly could; and as she still cried, he ran to her at the top of his speed.

All in a moment she seemed to become quite still, and though she trembled as she seized him, she did not scold him at all; while he mumbled out, "I only just went down for a very little while. I only wanted just to look for my top; I didn't take any of the nests," he continued, mentioning the most valuable things he had been amongst, according to his own opinion.

His grandmother had let go his hand and raised herself upright; her eyes were on the bit of gold band. "What's that?" she said faintly.

"It's nothing particular," said Peter, unwinding it slowly from his hand, and humbly giving it up. "It's nothing but a little sort of a gold band and an ornament that I found stuck in a tree." Then Peter-observing by her silence how high his misdemeanour had been, began to sob a little, and then to make a few excuses, and then to say he hoped his grand, mother would forgive him.

No answer.

"I wish I hadn't done it," he next said. He felt

that he could not say more than that, and he looked up at her. She was not regarding him at all, not attending to what he had said, her face was very white, she was clutching the bit of gold lace in her hand, and her wide-open eyes were staring at something above his head.

"Peter! Peter! Peter!" she cried again, in a strangely sharp and ringing voice. It seemed as if she would fall, and Peter caught hold of her arm and held her, while the thought darted through his mind, that perhaps she had called him at first because she was ill, and wanted him to hold her, not because she had observed his visit to the garden. He felt sure she could hardly stand, and he was very much frightened, but in a moment the nurse, having heard her cry, came running out, and between them they guided her to her chair in the alcove.

"I'm very sorry, grandmother," Peter sobbed, "and really, really I didn't take any nests or lilies or anything at all, but only that bit of stuff. I'll never do it again."

As he spoke he saw his mother and aunt coming up with looks of grief and awe, and on looking into his grandmother's face he beheld, child that he was,

a strange shadow passing over it, the shadow of death, and he instinctively knew what it was.

"Can't you move poor grandmother out of the sun?" he sobbed. "Oh do! I know she doesn't like it to shine in her eyes."

"Hush! hush!" his mother presently found voice enough to say amid her tears. "What can it signify?"

After that Peter cried very heartily because everybody else did, but in a little while when his grandmother had been able to drink some cordial, and while they were rubbing her cold hands, she opened her eyes, and then he thought perhaps she was going to get better. Oh, how earnestly he hoped might be so!

But there was no getting better for Madam Melcombe. She sat very still for some minutes, and looked like one newly awakened and very much amazed, then, to the great surprise of those about her, she rose without any aid, and stood holding by her high staff, while, with a slightly distraught air, she bowed to them, first one and then another.

"Well, I thank you for all your kindness, my dears," she said, "all your kindness. I may as well

go to them now; they've been waiting for me a long time. Good Lord!" she exclaimed, lifting up her eyes, "Good Lord! what a meeting it will be!"

Then she sank down into her chair again, and in a moment was gone.

## CHAPTER IV.

### SWARMS OF CHILDREN.

"As our hope is that this our sister doth."—*Burial Service.*

AND now was to take place that ceremony to which Madam Melcombe's thoughts had so often been directed. She had tried to arrange that it should be imposing, and imposing indeed it was, but not by virtue of the profusion of the refreshment, not by the presence of the best hearse from the county town, the best mourning coaches, the grandest plumes, but by the unsolicited attendance of a great company of people come together to do homage to a life distinguished by its misfortunes, its patience, and its charities.

She had never been able to think of herself as taking part in that ceremony unconsciously; her orders had always been given as if by one who felt that if things were meanly done she should know it; but in

taking care that refreshments should be provided for all the funeral attendants, she little thought that the whole parish, men and women, were to follow her, and most of them in tears. But it was so. The tenants had been invited; they walked after her in scarf and band, two and two, and after them, in such mourning as they could afford, came all the people, and pressed on in a procession that seemed to the real mourners almost endless, to look down upon her coffin and obtain a place near her grave.

It was out of doors, and all nature was in white. Round the churchyard pear-trees grew, and leaned their laden branches over its walls. Pear-trees, apple-trees, and cherries filled the valley and crowded one another up all the hills. Mr. Craik's voice, as he stood at the grave, also in white, was heard that quiet afternoon far and near. It was remarked on all sides how impressively he read, and there were plenty to be edified by the solemn words who had never heard his voice before, for many people had walked over from neighbouring parishes, and stood in groups at respectful distances.

All looked at the stranger-sons; they stood side by side, awe-struck, motionless, depressed. The old do

not easily shed tears, but there was something in the demeanour of both these old men that was felt to tell of no common emotion. One of them seemed unable to look down into the grave at all, he kept his eyes and his face lifted up. The other, as little Peter stood crying by his side, put his hand down and let it rest on the child's uncovered head, as if to quiet and comfort him.

This little, half-unconscious action gave great umbrage to some of the spectators. "Hadn't the dear child allers been the biggest comfort to his grandmother, and why indeed wasn't he to cry as much as ever he liked? He had nothing to reproach himself with, and if he had had his rights, he would have been made chief mourner. Those that stood next the corpse had never been any comfort or pleasure to her, but that dear child had walked beside her to church ever since he had been old enough to go there himself."

"And so those were Daniel and Augustus Mortimer's sons. Very fine young gentlemen too, one of them not over young, neither; he looked at least thirty. Well, very mysterious were the ways of Providence! Poor Cuthbert Melcombe, the eldest son,

had left neither chick nor child; no more had poor Griffith, the youngest. As for Peter, to be sure he had left children, but then he was gone himself. And these that had behaved so bad to their blessed mother were all she had to stand by her grave. It was very mysterious, but she was at rest now, and would never feel their undutifulness any more."

It was about four o'clock on that summer-like afternoon that the mourners came home from the funeral. The ladies for the sake of quiet retired with Peter to their rooms in the roof; the Mortimers, after partaking of a slight repast in the great parlour, stepped out and began to pace up and down before the house to refresh their spirits with a little air.

The will had been read in the morning, before the funeral took place. Valentine Mortimer and John Mortimer, the two grandsons, were both present. Valentine being a mere boy, barely eighteen, may well have been excused if he did not notice anything peculiar in the demeanour of the two old men; did not notice, as John Mortimer did, the restless excitement of both, and how they appeared to be sustaining and encouraging one another, and yet, when the important sentence came which left them without so much as

a shilling, how bravely and soberly they took it, without the least betrayal of mortified feeling, without any change of countenance or even of attitude.

Valentine had often heard his father say that he had no expectations from his mother, that he was quite sure the property never would come to him. He had believed this, and excepting that he found the preamble of the will solemn and the reading impressive, he did not take any special interest in it.

Every shilling and every acre were left to little Peter Melcombe, his mother being appointed his sole guardian till he reached the age of twelve years, and a request being added that her dear son Daniel would see to the repairing of the house, and the setting in order of the garden and woodland.

"And yet not a shilling left to either of them," thought John. "I always fancied there was some estrangement—felt sure of it; but if my father and uncle were so far friendly with their mother that she could ask this favour, how odd that she leaves nothing, not so much as a remembrance, to either of them! The eldest son, by all accounts, was a very violent, overbearing man; I've heard my father say as much; but he has been dead so long that, if there

was any estrangement on his account, they must have made it up long ago."

And now the funeral was over. John Mortimer, taking the youth with him, was walking about among the pear-trees close to the garden-wall, and the two old brothers, who appeared to have a dislike to being separated, even for a moment, were leisurely walking on, and in silence looking about them.

"I should like to get into the garden," said John Mortimer; "here's a door."

"But it's locked," remarked Valentine, "and Mrs. Peter Melcombe told me yesterday that none of them ever walked in it."

"Ah, indeed!" said John carelessly—he was far from giving a literal meaning to the information. "It looks a rotten old thing," he continued; "the key is in the house, no doubt, but I don't want to have the trouble of going in to ask for it."

"Perhaps it's not locked," said Valentine; "perhaps it only wants a push."

John and Valentine were standing among some cherry-trees, which, being thickly laden with their blossom, screened them from observation as far as the windows of the now opened house were con-

cerned. John did push, and when the door creaked he pushed again, and the rotten old lock yielded, came away from the lintel, and as the two old fathers turned, they were just in time to see their sons disappear through the doorway and walk into the garden. With a troubled glance at one another, and an effort not to appear in haste, the fathers followed them.

"Can't we get them away?" exclaimed Mr. Mortimer; "can't we tell them to come out?"

"Certainly not, certainly not, brother," answered old Augustus, in a reassuring tone. "You'll not say a word to dissuade them from going wherever they please."

"No," said the other, in a nervous, hesitating manner. "You're quite right, Augustus; you always are."

"Is it not a strange place?" exclaimed John, as they walked forward and looked about them. "It seems to me that really and truly they never do enter it."

"Well, I told you so," answered Valentine. "It is on account of the eldest son. Miss Melcombe told me that he was a very eccentric character, and for many years before his death he made gardening his one occupation. He never suffered any one but

himself to garden here, not even so much as to mow the grass. After he was dead the poor old grandmother locked it up. She didn't like any one else to meddle with it."

"Why, he was dead before I was born," exclaimed John, "and I am two-and-thirty. Poor soul! and she never got over that misfortune, then, in all those years. There's a grand pear-tree! lots of rotten fruit lying under it—and what a fine apple-tree! Is this of the celebrated 'redstreak' variety, I wonder, that Phillips praises so in his poem on cider?"

"A poem on cider?"

"Yes, I tell you, a poem on cider, and as long as 'Paradise Lost.' It has some very fine passages in it, and has actually been translated into Italian. I picked up a copy of it at Verona when I was a boy, and learned a good deal of it by heart, by way of helping myself with the language. I remember some of it to this day:—

'Voi, donne, e Cavalier del bel paese
A cui propizio il ciel tanto concesse
Di bene, udite il mio cantare,' &c., &c.

I wonder, now, whether this is a redstreak."

As their sons talked thus the two fathers approached,

and gravely looked on at this scene of riotous and yet lovely desolation. Nests with eggs in them adorned every little bush, vines having broken the trellis ran far along the ground. John, remembering that the place must have painful thoughts connected with their dead brother for his father and uncle, continued to talk to Valentine, and did not address either of them: and whatever they may have felt they did not say a word; but Valentine presently observed the bed of lilies, and he and John moved on together, the two fathers following.

They outwalked their fathers, and Valentine, stooping over the bed, gathered two or three of the lovely flowers.

"The poor old grandmother!" he observed. "Miss Melcombe told me she loved to watch this bed of lilies, and said only a few days ago, that she could wish they might never be disturbed."

He turned—both the old men stood stock still behind him, looking down on the lily-bed. Valentine repeated what Miss Melcombe had told him. "So no doubt, papa, you'll give orders that it shall not be touched, as you are going to have all the place put in order."

"Yes, yes, certainly my boy—certainly he will," said Uncle Augustus, answering for his brother.

Valentine was not gifted with at all more feeling or sentiment than usually falls to the lot of a youth of his age, but a sort of compunction visited him at that moment to think how soon they all, alive and well, had invaded the poor old woman's locked and guarded sanctuary! He stooped to gather another lily, and offered the flowers to his father. Old Daniel looked at the lilies, but his unready hand did not move forward to take them; in fact, it seemed that he slightly shrank back. With an instantaneous flash of surprise Valentine felt rather than thought, "If you were dead, father, I would not decline to touch what you had loved." But in the meantime his uncle had put forth a hand and received them. "And yet," thought Valentine, "I know father must have felt that old lady's death. Why, when he was in the mourning-coach he actually cried." And so thinking, as he walked back to the garden-door with John Mortimer, he paused to let John pass first; and chancing to turn his head for one instant, he saw his uncle stoop and jerk those lilies under a clump of lilac bushes, where they were hidden. Before either of

the old men had noticed that he had turned, Valentine was walking with his cousin outside, but an uneasy sensation of surprise and suspicion haunted him. He could not listen to John Mortimer's talk, and when the rest of the party had gone back to the house, he lingered behind, returned to the garden, and, stooping down for an instant, saw that it was as he had supposed; there, under the lilac bushes, were lying those gathered lilies.

So he went back to the house. The two grandsons were to return home that afternoon; the two sons were going to remain for a few days, that the wishes of the deceased might have prompt attention, as regarded the setting of the place in order. They were to sleep at the inn in the hamlet, by their own desire, that, as they said, they might not give trouble.

When Valentine entered the great parlour, his cousin was talking to Peter's mother, and in the presence of his father and uncle he was inviting her to let the boy come and stay awhile with his children shortly.

Mrs. Peter Melcombe hesitated, and observed that her dear child had never been away from her in his life, and was very shy.

"No wonder," quoth John Mortimer; "but I have

several jolly little boys and girls at home; they would soon cure him of that."

Mrs. Peter Melcombe seemed pleased. She had taken a great fancy to the good-looking young widower; she remarked that Peter had never been used to playing with other children—she was half-afraid he would get hurt; but as Mr. Mortimer was so kind she would risk it.

"Poor little beggar!" said John Mortimer to his father, as they all walked to the inn together; "those two women will mope that boy into his grave if they don't look out."

"No, John," exclaimed his uncle, "I hope you really don't think so."

John, in spite of his youth, had some experience. He had already filled his house with little Mortimers. There were seven of them—some of the largest pattern, and with the finest appetites possible. So his opinion carried weight, and was at the same time worth nothing, for as his children had never but once had anything the matter with them, his general view of childhood was that if it had plenty to eat, a large garden to play in, and leave to go out in all weathers, it was sure to prosper, as in fact the little Mortimers

did. They brought themselves up (with a certain amount of interference from their governess) in a high state of health and good-humour, and with no quarrelling to speak of, while the amount of sleep they got out of their little beds, the rapid skill with which they wore down their shoes, and the quantity of rice milk and roast meat they could consume, were a wonder to the matrons round.

"I see nothing special the matter with him," continued John Mortimer; "but one cannot help pitying a child that has no companions and no liberty. I thought I should like to plunge him for a little while into the sweet waters of real child-life, and let him learn to shout and stamp and dig and climb, as my little urchins do."

"But his mother is a poor, faded, fat creature," observed Valentine. "You'll see she won't let that boy go. You can no more get her to do a sensible thing than you can dry your face with a wet towel."

"Gently, sir, gently," said his father, not liking this attempt at a joke on a day which had begun so solemnly.

So Mr. John Mortimer presently departed, taking

his handsome young cousin with him, and the old men, with heavy steps and depressed countenances, went into the inn and began anxiously to talk over the various repairs that would be wanted, and all that would have to be done in the garden and the grounds.

In the meantime it was known in the neighbourhood that parson Craik was going to preach a funeral sermon for poor old Madam the very next Sunday morning, and an edifying description of her death passed from mouth to mouth—how she had called her little great-grandson, Peter, to her as the child was playing near, probably that she might give him her blessing—how, when the nurse came running out, she had seen her looking most earnestly at him, but evidently not able to say a word. Afterwards, she had a little revived and had risen and beautifully expressed her gratitude to all about her for their long kindness and attention, and then, how, piously lifting up her hands and eyes, she had told them that she was now going to meet with those that she had loved and lost. "O Lord!" she had exclaimed, "what a meeting that will be!" and thereupon she had departed without a sigh.

For several days after this Mr. Mortimer and his brother went about the business left to them to do. They sent for an architect, and put the house into his hands to be thoroughly repaired. Mrs. Peter Melcombe was desirous not to leave it, and this they arranged to allow, giving orders that the apartments which the family had always occupied should remain untouched till the rest of the house was finished and ready for her. They also had the garden-door repaired to give her ingress, and the gallery-gate taken away. These same sons who for so many years had never come near their mother, seemed now very anxious to attend to her every wish; scarcely a shrub was cut down in the garden excepting in the presence of one of them, and when Mrs. Peter Melcombe especially begged that the grandmother's wish respecting the bed of lilies might be attended to, Mr. Mortimer, with evident emotion, gave orders to the gardener that it should not be touched.

And then Sunday came, and with it a trial that the two sons had not expected. It was announced by the churchwarden to the family, first to the ladies at the hall, and then to the gentlemen at the inn, that Mr. Craik was going to preach a funeral sermon.

He did not wish, he said, to take them by surprise —he felt that they would wish to know. In his secret soul he believed that the old men would not come to hear it—he hoped they would not, because their absence would enable him more freely to speak of the misfortunes of the deceased.

But they did come. The manner of their coming was thought by the congregation to be an acknowledgment that they felt their fault. They did not look any one in the face; but with brows bent down, and eyes on the ground, they went to the places given them in the family pew, and when morning prayers were over and the text was given out, as still as stones they sat and listened.

"Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

The sermon was more full of eulogy than was in good taste, but the ladies of the family did not find it so; they wept passionately—so did many of the congregation, but the two sons, though their hands might plainly be seen to tremble, maintained a deep, distressed immobility, and because it was neither right to upbraid them to their faces, nor to judge them publicly, a piece of the sermon which concerned

Madam Melcombe's sorrow, caused by their desertion, was mercifully left out.

That was the last the people saw of the brothers; they went away almost before it was light on Monday morning, and for a long time after, their faces, their words, and their every attitude, remained the talk of the place.

In the meantime, John Mortimer and Valentine had a very pleasant little excursion. As soon as they were out of the presence of their fathers, they naturally threw off any unusual gravity of demeanour, for though suitable to a solemn funeral, this might well pass away with it, as their grandmother had been a total stranger to them.

John hired horses, and they rode about the country together to see the rosy apple orchards; they inspected an old Roman town, then they went and looked at some fine ruins, and otherwise they enjoyed themselves for three days; for John had plenty of money, and Valentine was far from suspecting that not many months before his own father had dispossessed him, with himself, of an ample fortune and a good inheritance. He had always been brought up to understand that his father was not well off, and

that he would have to work for his place in the world. John's place was made already—lucky for him! Lucky for Valentine, too, for John was very liberal to his young relative, and had taken him about with him more than once before.

So the first few days after the reading of that will were passed by Valentine in very good spirits, and with much self-gratulation on things in general. John invited him to stay at his house till his father came home, and Valentine accepting, they reached their station, and John was at once received into the bosom of his family, that is to say, he was pushed and pulled with difficulty into a very large carriage so excessively full of young Mortimers that it was perfectly impossible to add Valentine also.

"What did you bring them all for?" said John, falling foul of the servants in a momentary fit of impatience, while they sat smiling all over him.

" Well, sir, they were all inside the carriage and out of it ready, before even we put the horses to. We didn't know which to pull out," answered the coachman, grinning.

John Mortimer's house was only reached by a country lane; and to all appearances (though it was

situated but two miles from the small town of Wigfield), it was buried in the depths of the country. It was a thoroughly unreasonable house, appearing outside to be more than half of it roof, the stables being so arranged as to seem almost imposing in comparison with it.

These stables ran down at right angles with the house, their windows and doors below, being on the further side. But a story had been added which was made of long wooden shingles, and one of these shingles having been removed to admit light and air, you might very often see seven round faces in a row looking out there, for the opening overlooked every window in the front of the house without exception. The long loft, which was called "parliament," and had been annexed by the children, admitted of their sending down cheerful greetings to their grandfather and other friends; and it was interesting, particularly when there was company to dinner, to watch their father sitting at the head of the table, and to see the dishes handed round.

The inside of the house was peculiar also. There was a very fine hall in the centre, and a really beautiful old oak staircase wound round it, being adorned

with carving, and having a fine old fireplace on one of the landings. This hall was the only good room in the house: on the right of it were the kitchens and the kitchen offices, on its left was the dining-room, which was a thoroughfare to the drawing-room, and through that again you reached a pleasant library; John Mortimer's own particular den or smoking room being beyond again. All these rooms had thorough lights excepting the last, and in fine weather every one entered them, back or front, from the garden.

Up-stairs there were a great many bedrooms, and not one good one: most of them had sloping roofs. Then there was a long school-room, with a little staircase of its own. You could make a good deal of noise in that room, and not be heard beyond it; but this circumstance is no particular advantage, if your father has no nerves at all, and scarcely observes whether there is a noise or not.

John and Valentine Mortimer had a cheerful dinner, and after that a riotous game at romps with the children. It was four days since the funeral; it had now passed into the background of their thoughts, and they concerned themselves very little further with the will

of old Madam Melcombe; for it must not be supposed that they knew much about her—not half as much, in fact, as every man, woman, and child knew round about the place where her house was situated.

They knew she had had a large family of sons, and that their father and uncle had left home early in life —had been *sent away*, was their thought, or would have been if the question had ever been raised so as to lead them to think about it.

They were sent to Wigfield, which was about sixty miles from their home. Here they had an old second cousin, of whom they always spoke with great respect and affection. He took Augustus into his bank, and not only became as fond of him as if he had been his son, but eventually left him half of what he possessed. Daniel went into a lawyer's office, and got on very well; but he was not at all rich, and had always let his son know, that though there was an estate in the family, it never could come to him. John having also been told this, had not doubted that there must have been a family quarrel at some time or other; but in his own mind he never placed it very far back, but always fancied it must be connected with his

uncle's first marriage, which was a highly imprudent and very miserable one.

Whatever it had arisen from, his father had evidently taken part with his uncle; but old Augustus never mentioned the subject. John was aware that he wrote to his mother once a year, but she never answered. This might be, John thought, on account of her great age and her infirmities; and that very evening he began to dismiss the subject from his mind, being aided by the circumstance that he was himself the only son of a very rich and loving father, so that anything the mother might have left to her second surviving son was not a matter of the slightest importance to her grandson, or ever likely to be.

## CHAPTER V.

### OF A FINE MAN AND SOME FOOLISH WOMEN.

"For life is like unto a winter's day,
Some break their fast and so depart away;
Others stay dinner, then depart full fed;
The longest age but sups, and goes to bed."

ANON.

MR. JOHN MORTIMER, as has before been said, was the father of seven children. It may now be added that he had been a widower one year and a half.

Since the death of his wife he had been his own master, and, so far as he cared to be, the master of his household.

This had not been the case previously: his wife had ruled over him and his children, and had been happy on the whole, though any woman whose house, containing four sitting-rooms only, finds that they are all thoroughfares, and feels that one of the deepest joys of life is that of giving dinner-parties, and better

ones than her neighbours, must be held to have a grievance—a grievance against architects, which no one but an architect can cure.

And yet old Augustus, in generously presenting this house, roof and all, to his son, had said, "And my dears, both of you, beware of bricks and mortar. I have no doubt, John, when you are settled, that you and Janie will find defects in your house. My experience is that all houses have defects; but my opinion is, that it is better to pull a house down, and build a new one, than to try to remedy them."

Mr. Augustus Mortimer had tried building, rebuilding, and altering houses more than once; and his daughter-in-law knew that he would be seriously vexed if she disregarded his advice.

Of course if it had been John himself that had objected, the thing would have been done in spite of that; but his father must be considered, she knew, for in fact everything depended on him.

John had been married the day he came of age. His father had wished it greatly: he thought it a fine thing for a man to marry early, if he could afford it. The bride wished it also, but the person who wished it most of all was her mother, who managed to make

John think he wished it too, and so, with a certain moderation of feeling, he did; and if things had not been made so exceedingly easy for him, he might have attained almost to fervour on the occasion.

As it was, being young for his years, as well as in fact, he had hardly forgotten to pride himself on having a house of his own, and reached the dignified age of twenty-two, when Mrs. John Mortimer, presenting him with a son, made a man of him in a day, and threw his boyish thoughts into the background. To his own astonishment, he found himself greatly pleased with his heir. His father was pleased also, and wrote to the young mother something uncommonly like a letter of thanks, at the same time presenting her with a carriage and horses.

The next year, perhaps in order to deserve an equally valuable gift (which she obtained), she presented her husband with twin daughters; and was rather pleased than otherwise to find that he was glad, and that he admired and loved his children.

Mrs. John Mortimer felt a decided preference for her husband over any other young man; she liked him, besides which he had been a most desirable match for her in point of circumstances; but when

her first child was born to her she knew, for the first time in her life, what it was to feel a real and warm affection. She loved her baby; she may have been said, without exaggeration, to have loved him very much; she had thenceforward no time to attend to John, but she always ruled over his household beautifully, made his friends welcome, and endeared herself to her father-in-law by keeping the most perfect accounts, never persuading John into any kind of extravagance, and always receiving hints from headquarters with the greatest deference.

The only defect her father-in-law had, in her opinion, was that he was so inconveniently religious; his religion was inconvenient not only in degree but in kind. It troubled her peace to come in contact with states of mind very far removed not only from what she felt, but what she wished to feel. If John's father had set before her anything that she and John could do, or any opinion that they might hold, she thought she should have been able to please him, for she considered herself quite inclined to do her duty by her church and her soul in a serious and sensible manner; but to take delight in religion, to add the love of the unseen Father to the fear and reverence that she

wanted to cultivate, was something that it alarmed her to think of.

It was all very well to read of it in the Bible, because that concerned a by-gone day, or even to hear a clergyman preach of it, this belonged to his office; but when this old man, with his white beard, talked to her and her husband just as David had talked in some of his psalms, she was afraid, and found his aspiration worse to her than any amount of exhortation could have been.

What so impossible to thought as such a longing for intercourse with the awful and the remote—"With my soul have I desired thee in the night;" "My soul is athirst for God;" no, not so, says the listener who stands without—I will come to his house and make obeisance, but let me withdraw soon again from his presence, and dwell undaunted among my peers.

There is, indeed, nothing concerning which people more fully feel that they cannot away with it than another man's aspiration.

And her husband liked it. He was not afraid, as she was, of the old man's prayers, though he fully believed they would be answered.

He tried to be loyal to the light he walked in, and

his father rested in a trust concerning him and his, which had almost the assurance of possession.

She also, in the course of a few years, came to believe that she must ere long be drawn into a light which as yet had not risen. She feared it less, but never reached the point of wishing to see it shine.

At varying intervals, Mrs. John Mortimer presented her husband with another lovely and healthy infant, and she also, in her turn, received a gift from her father-in-law, together with the letter of thanks.

In the meantime her husband grew. He became first manly, more manly than the average man, as is often the case with those who have an unusually long boyhood. Then by culture and travel he developed the resources of a keenly observant and very thoughtful mind. Then his love for his children made a naturally sweet temper sweeter still, and in the course of a very few years he had so completely left his wife behind, that it never occurred to him to think of her as a companion for his inner life. He liked her; she never nagged; he considered her an excellent housekeeper; in fact, they were mutually pleased with one another; their cases were equal; both often thought

they might have been worse off, and neither regretted with any keenness what they had never known.

Sometimes, having much sweetness of nature, it would chance that John Mortimer's love for his children would overflow in his wife's direction, on which, as if to recall him to himself, she would say, not coldly, but sensibly, "Don't be silly, John dear." But if he expressed gratitude on her account, as he sometimes did when she had an infant of a few days old in her arms, if his soul appeared to draw nearer to her then, and he inclined to talk of deeper and wider things than they commonly spoke of, she was always distinctly aggrieved. A tear perhaps would twinkle in her eye. She was affected by his relief after anxiety, and his gratitude for her safety; but she did not like to feel affected, and brought him back to the common level of their lives as soon as possible.

So they lived together in peace and prosperity till they had seven children, and then, one fine autumn, Mrs. John Mortimer persuaded her father-in-law to do up the house, so far as papering and painting were concerned. She then persuaded John to take a tour, and went herself to the sea-side with her children.

From this journey she did not return. Their

father had but just gone quite out of her reach when the children took scarlet fever, and she summoned their grandfather to her aid. In this, her first great anxiety and trouble, for some of them were extremely ill, all that she had found most oppressive in his character appeared to suit her. He pleased and satisfied her; but the children were hardly better, so that he had time to consider what it was that surprised him in her, when she fell ill herself, and before her husband reached home had died in his father's arms.

All the children recovered. John Mortimer took them home, and for the first six months after her death he was miserably disconsolate. It was not because they had been happy, but because they had been so very comfortable. He aggravated himself into thinking that he could have loved her more if he had only known how soon he should lose her; he looked at all their fine healthy joyous children, and grieved to think that now they were his only.

But the time came when he knew that he could have loved her much more if she would have let him; and when he had found out that, womankind in general went down somewhat in his opinion. He

made up his mind, as he thought, that he would not marry again; but this, he knew in his secret heart, was less for her sake than for his own.

Then, being of an ardently affectionate nature, and having now no one to restrain it, he began to study his children with more anxious care, and consider their well-being with all his might.

The children of middle-aged people seem occasionally to come into the world ready tamed. With a certain old-fashioned primness, they step sedately through the paths of childhood. So good, so easy to manage, so—uninteresting?

The children of the very young have sometimes an extra allowance of their father's youth in their blood. At any rate the little Mortimers had.

Their joy was ecstatic, their play was fervent, and as hard as any work. They seemed month by month to be crowding up to their father, in point of stature, and when he and they all went about the garden together, some would be treading on his heels, the select two who had hold of his arms would be shouting in his ears, and the others, dancing in front, were generally treading on his toes, in their desire to get as near as possible and inform him of all the wonderful

things that were taking place in this new and remarkable world.

Into this family the lonely little heir of the Melcombes was shortly invited to come for awhile, but for some trivial reason his mother declined the invitation, at the same time expressing her hope that Mr. Mortimer would kindly renew it some other time.

It was not convenient to John Mortimer to invite the boy again for a long time—so long that his mother bitterly repented not having accepted the first invitation. She had an aunt living at Dartmouth, and whenever her boy was invited by John Mortimer, she meant to bring him herself, giving out that she was on her way to visit that relative.

Who knew what might happen?

Mr. John Mortimer was a fine man, tall, broad-shouldered, and substantial-looking, though not at all stout. His perfect health and teeth as white as milk made him look even younger than he was. His countenance, without being decidedly handsome, was fine and very agreeable. His hair was light, of the Saxon hue, and his complexion was fair.

Thus he had many advantages; but Mrs. Peter Melcombe felt that as the mother of a child so richly

endowed, and as the possessor of eight hundred a year in order that he might be suitably brought up, she was a desirable match also. She did not mean the boy to cost her much for several years to come, and till he came of age (if he lived) she had that handsome old house to live in. Old Augustus Mortimer, on the other hand, was very rich, she knew; he was a banker and his only son was his partner. Sure to inherit his banking business and probably heir to his land.

Mrs. Peter Melcombe had some handsome and becoming raiment made, and waited with impatience; for in addition to Mr. John Mortimer's worldly advantages she found him attractive.

So did some other people. John Mortimer's troubles on that head began very soon after the sending of his first invitation to Mrs. Melcombe, when the excellent elderly lady who taught the little Mortimers (and in a great measure kept his house) let him know that she could no longer do justice to them. They got on so fast, they had such spirits, they were so active and so big, that she felt she could not cope with them. Moreover, the three eldest were exceptionally clever, and the noise made by the whole tribe fatigued her.

John sent his eldest boy to school, promised her

masters to help her, and an assistant governess, but she would not stay, and with her went for a time much of the comfort of that house.

Mr. Mortimer easily got another governess—a very pretty young lady who did not, after a little while, take much interest in the children, but certainly did take an interest in him. She was always contriving to meet him—in the hall, on the stairs, in the garden. Then she looked at him at church, and put him so out of countenance and enraged him, and made him feel so ridiculous, that one day he took himself off to the Continent, and kept away till she was gone.

Having managed that business, he got another governess, and she let him alone, and the children too, for they completely got the better of her; used to make her romp with them, and sometimes went so far as to lock her into the schoolroom. It was not till this lady had taken her leave and another had been found that Mr. John Mortimer repeated his invitation to little Peter Melcombe. His mother brought him, and according to the programme she had laid down, got herself invited to stay a few days.

She had no trouble about it. Mr. John Mortimer

no sooner saw Mrs. Melcombe than he expressed a hospitable, almost a fervent hope, that she could stay a week with him.

Of course Mrs. Melcombe accepted the invitation, and he was very sociable and pleasant; but she thought the governess (a very grand lady indeed) took upon herself more than beseemed her, and smiled at her very scornfully when she ventured to say sweet things to John Mortimer on her own great love for children, and on the charms of his children in particular.

Peter was excessively happy. His mother's happiness in the visit was soon over. She shortly found out that an elderly Scotch lady, one Miss Christie Grant, an aunt of the late Mrs. Daniel Mortimer, was to come in a few days and pay a long visit, and she shrewdly suspected that the attractive widower being afraid to remain alone in his own house, made arrangements to have female visitors to protect him, and hence the invitation to her. But she had to leave Peter at the end of the week, and which of the two ladies when they parted hated the other most it might be difficult to determine.

It cannot be said with truth that Peter regretted

his mother's departure. The quantity of mischief he was taught (of a not very heinous description) by two sweet little imps of boys younger than himself, kept him in a constant state of joyous excitement. His grandmother having now been dead a year and a quarter, his mourning had been discarded, and his mother had been very impressive in her cautions to him not to spoil his new clothes, but before he had been staying with his young friends a fortnight he was much damaged in his outer man, as indeed he was also in his youthful heart, for the smallest of all the Mortimers—a lovely little child about three years old—took entire possession of it; and when he was not up a tree with the boys in a daring hunt after bergamy pears, or wading barefoot in a shallow stream at the bottom of the garden catching water-beetles, caddis-worms, and other small cattle for a freshwater aquarium, he was generally carrying this child about the garden pickaback, or otherwise obeying her little behests, and assuring her of his unalterable love.

Poor little Peter! After staying fully six weeks with the Mortimers his time came to be taken home again, and his mother, who spent two days with them on her way northwards, bore him off to the railway,

accompanied by the host and most of his children. Then he suddenly began to feel the full meaning of the misfortune that had fallen on him, and he burst into wailings and tears. His tiny love had promised to marry him when she was grown up; his two little friends had given him some sticklebacks, packed in wet moss; they were now in his pockets, as were also some water-beetles in a paper bag; the crown of his cap was full of silkworms carefully wrapped in mulberry leaves; but all these treasures could not avail to comfort him for loss of the sweet companionship he had enjoyed—for the apples he had crunched in the big dog's kennel when hiding with another little imp from the nurse—for the common possession they had enjoyed of some young rats dug out of the bank of the stream, and more than all, for the tender confidences there had been between them as to the endless pranks they spent their lives in, and all the mischief they had done or that they aspired to do.

John Mortimer having a keen sympathy with childhood, felt rue at heart for the poor little blinking, sobbing fellow; but to invite him again might be to have his mother also, so he let him go, handing in from his third daughter's arms to the young heir a

wretched little blind puppy and a small bottle of milk to feed it with on the way.

If anything could comfort a boy, this precious article could. So the Mortimer boys thought. So in fact it proved. As the train moved off they heard the sobs of Peter and the yelping of the puppy, but before they reached their happy home he had begun to nurse the little beast in his arms, and derive consolation from watching its movements and keeping it warm.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE SHADOW OF A SHADE.

"The world would lose its finest joys
Without its little girls and boys;
Their careless glee and simple ruth,
And innocence and trust and truth;
Ah! what would your poor poet do
Without such little folk as you?"

LOCKER.

"WELL, anyhow," observed Mr. Nicholas Swan the gardener, when the children came home and told him how Peter had cried—"anyhow, there's one less on you now to run over my borders. He was as meek as Moses, that child was, when first he came, but you soon made him as audacious as any of you."

"So they did, Nicholas dear," said one of the twins, a tall, dark-haired child.

"Oh, it's Nicholas *dear*, is it, Miss Barbara? Well, now, what next?"

"Why, the key of the fruit-house—we want the key."

"Key, indeed! Now, there's where it is. Make a wry path through your fields, and still you'll walk in it! I never ought to ha' got in the habit of lending you that key. What's the good of a key if a man can never keep it in his pocket? When I lived up at Mr. Daniel Mortimer's, the children never had my key—never."

"Well, come with us, then, and give us out the pears yourself. We won't take one."

Nicholas, with a twin on each side, and the other children bringing up the rear, was now walked off to the fruit-house, grumbling as he went.

"I left Mr. Mortimer's, I did, because I couldn't stand the children; and now the world's a deal fuller of 'em than it was then. No, Miss Gladys, I'm not a-going any faster; I wouldn't run, if it was ever so. When the contrac' was signed of my wages, it was never wrote down that I had to run at any time."

And having now reached the fruit-house, he was just pulling out his big key, when something almost like shame showed itself in his ruddy face, as a decided and somewhat mocking voice addressed him.

"Well, Nicholas, I'm just amazed at ye! I've lived upward of sixty years in this island, Scotland and

England both, and never did I see a man got over so by children in my life! Talking of my niece's children, are ye—Mrs. Daniel Mortimer's? I wonder at ye—they were just nothing to these."

Here Mr. Swan, having unlocked the door, dived into the fruit-house, and occupied himself for some moments in recovering his self-possession and making his selection; then emerging with an armful of pears, he shouted after Miss Christie Grant, who had got a good way down the walk by this time.

"I don't deny, ma'am, that these air aggravating now and then, but anyhow they haven't painted my palings pink and my door pea-green."

Miss Christie returned. She seldom took the part of any children, excepting for the sake of argument or for family reasons; and she felt at that moment that the Daniel Mortimers were related to her, and that these, though they called her "aunt," were not.

"Ye should remember," she observed, with severity, "that ye had already left your house when they painted it."

"Remember it!" exclaimed the gardener, straightening himself; "ay, ay, I remember it—coming along the lane that my garden sloped down to, so that

every inch of it could be seen. It had been all raked over, and there, just out of the ground, growing up in mustard-and-cress letters as long as my arm, I saw '*This genteel residence to let, lately occupied by N. Swan, Esq.*' I took my hob-nailed boots to them last words, and I promise you I made the mustard-and-cress fly."

"Well, ye see," observed Miss Christie, who was perfectly serious, "there is great truth in your saying that those children did too much as they pleased; but ye must consider that Mr. Mortimer didn't like to touch any of them, because they were not his own."

"That's just it, ma'am, and Mrs. Mortimer didn't like to touch any of them because they *were her own;* so between the two they got to be, I don't say as bad as these, but—" Here he shook his head, and leaning his back to the fruit-house door, began diligently to peel the fruit for an assembly, silent, because eating. "As for Master Giles," he went on, more to torment the old lady than to disparage the gentleman in question, "before ever he went to school, he chalked a picture that he called my arms on the tool-house-door, three turnips as natural as life, and a mad kind

of bird flourishing its wings about, that he said was a swan displayed. Underneath, for a *morter*, was wrote, 'All our geese air swans.' Now what do you call that for ten years old?"

"Well, well," said Aunt Christie, "that's nearly twenty years ago."

Then the fruit being all finished, N. Swan, Esq., shut up his clasp-knife, and the story being also finished, his audience ran away, excepting Miss Christie, to whom he said—

"But I was fond of those children, you'll understand, though they were powerful plagues."

"Swan," said the old lady, "ye'll never be respectit by children. You're just what ye often call yourself, *soft*."

"And what's the good of being rough with 'em, ma'am? I can no more make 'em sober and sensible than I could straighten out their bushes of curly hair. No, not though I was to take my best rake to it. They're powerful plagues, bless 'em! but so far as I can see, we're in this world mainly to bring them forrard in it. I remember when my Joey was a very little chap, he was playing by me with a tin sword that he was proud of. I was sticking peas in

my own garden, and a great hulking sergeant came by, and stopped a minute to ask his road. 'Don't you be afraid of me,' says Joey, very kind. 'I won't hurt 'e.' That man laughed, but the water stood in his eyes. He'd lost such a one, he said. Children air expensive, but it's very cutting to lose 'em. I've never seen any of the Mortimers in that trouble yet, though."

"And you've been many a long year with them too," observed Miss Christie.

"Ay, ma'am. Some folks air allers for change, but I've known when I was well off and they've known when they were well off." Mr. Swan said this in a somewhat pragmatical tone, and continued, "There's nothing but a long course of just dealing and respect o' both sides as can buy such digging as this here family gets out of my spade."

"Very true," said Miss Christie, who did not appear to see anything peculiar in this self-eulogy.

"But some folks forget," continued Mr. Swan, "that transplanted trees won't grow the first year, and others want too much for their money, and too good of its kind; but fair and softly, thinks I; you can't buy five shillings with threepence-halfpenny in

any shop that I ever heerd of; and when you've earned half-a-crown you can't be paid it in gold."

The next morning, while Peter sat at breakfast revolving in his mind the delights he had lost, and wondering what Janie and Bertie and Hugh and Nancy were about, these staunch little friends of his were unconsciously doing the greatest damage to his future prospects—to their most important part, as he understood them, namely, his chance of coming to see the Mortimers again.

Miss Christie Grant always presided over the school-room breakfast, and John Mortimer, unless he had other visitors, breakfasted alone, generally coming down just after his children's meal was over, and having a selection of them with him morning by morning.

On this occasion, just as he came down, his children darted out of the window, exclaiming, "Oh, there's Mr. Brandon down the garden—Mr. Brandon's come."

John walked to the window, and looked out with a certain scrutinising interest; for it was but a few weeks since a somewhat important visitor had left old Daniel Mortimer's house—one concerning whom

the neighbourhood had decided that she certainly ought to become Mrs. Giles Brandon, and that it would be an odd thing if Mr. Brandon did not think so. If he did, there was every appearance that she did not, for she had gone away all but engaged to his young brother Valentine.

"He looks dull, decidedly dull, since Miss Graham left them," soliloquised John Mortimer. "I thought so the last time I saw him, and now I am sure of it. Poor fellow," he continued with a half smile. "I can hardly fancy him a lover, but, if he does care for that graceful little sea-nymph, it is hard on him that such a shallow-pated boy as Valentine should stand in his light;" and he stepped out to meet his guest, who was advancing in the midst of the children, while at the same time they shouted up at the open school-room window that Nancy must come down directly and see her godfather.

The grand lady-governess looked out in a becoming morning costume.

"A fine young man," she remarked to Miss Christie Grant.

"Yes, that's my oldest nephew, St. George they call him. Giles Brandon is his name, but his mother aye

disliked the name of Giles, thought it was only fit for a ploughman. So she called him St. George, and that's what he is now, and will be."

Miss Christie Grant said this with a certain severity of manner, but she hardly knew how to combine a snubbing to the lady for her betrayal of interest in all the bachelors round, with her desire to boast of this relative. So she presently went on in a more agreeable tone. "His mother married Mr. Daniel Mortimer; he is an excellent young man. Has no debts and has been a great traveller. In short a year and a half ago he was shipwrecked, and as nearly lost his life as possible. He was picked up by Captain Graham, whose grand-daughter (no, I think Miss Graham is the old gentleman's niece) has been staying this summer with Mr. Daniel Mortimer. Mr. Brandon, ye'll understand, is only half-brother to Valentine Mortimer, whom ye frequently see."

Valentine was too young to interest the grand lady, but when by a combined carelessness of manner with judicious questioning she had discovered that the so-called St. George had a moderate independence, and prospects besides, she felt a longing wish to carry down little Anastasia herself to see her god-

father, and was hardly restrained from doing so by that sense of propriety which never forsook her. In the mean time Brandon passed out of view into the room where breakfast was spread, and the little Anastasia, so named because her birth had taken place on Easter day, was brought down smiling in her sister Barbara's arms.

Peter's little love, a fair and dimpled creature, was forthwith accommodated with a chair close to her godfather, while the twins withdrew to practise their duets, and more viands were placed on the table.

The children then began to wait on their father and his guest, and during a short conversation which ensued concerning Mrs. Peter Melcombe and her boy, they were quite silent, till a pause took place and the little Anastasia lifted up her small voice and distinguished herself by saying—

"Fader, Peter's dot a dhost in his darden."

"Got a ghost!" exclaimed John Mortimer, with a look of dismay; for ghosts were the last things he wished his children to hear anything about.

"Yes," said the youngest boy Hugh, "he says he's going to be rather a grand gentleman when he's grown up, but he wishes he hadn't got a ghost."

"Then why doesn't he sell it, Huey?" asked the guest with perfect gravity.

The little fellow opened his blue eyes wider. "I don't think you know what ghosts are," he remarked.

"Oh yes, I do," answered Brandon. "I've often read about them. Some people think a good deal of them, but I never could see the fun of having them myself, and," he continued, "I never noticed any about your premises, John."

"No," answered John Mortimer, following his lead; "they would be no use for the children to play with."

"Do they scratch, then?" inquired the little Anastasia.

"No, my beauty bright, but I'm told they only wake up when it's too dark for children to play."

"Peter's ghost doesn't," observed Master Bertram. "He came in the morning."

"Did he steal anything?" inquired Brandon, still desirous, it seemed, to throw dirt at the great idea.

"Oh no, he didn't steal," said the other little boy, "that's not what they're for."

"What did he say then?"

"He gave a deep sigh, but he didn't say *nothink*."

"Ghosts," said Bertie, following up his brother's

speech as one who had full information—"ghosts are not birds, they don't come to lay eggs for you, or to be of any use at all. They come for you to be afraid of. Didn't you know that, father?"

John was too much vexed to answer, and Peter's chance from that moment of ever entering those doors again was not worth a rush.

"But you needn't mind, father dear," said Janie, the eldest child present, "Peter's ghost won't come here. It doesn't belong to 'Grand,' or to any of us. Its name was Melcombe, and it came from the sea, that they might know it was dead." John and Brandon looked at one another. The information was far too circumstantial to be forgotten by the children, who continued their confidences now without any more irreverent interruptions. "Mrs. Melcombe gave Peter four half-crowns to give to nurse, and he had to say 'Thank you, nurse, for your kindness to me;' but nurse wasn't kind, she didn't like Peter, and she slapped him several times."

"And Mrs. Melcombe gave some more shillings to Maria," said Bertie.

"Like the garden slug," observed Brandon, "leaving a trail of silver behind her."

The said Maria, who was their little nursemaid, now came in to fetch away the children.

"Isn't this provoking," exclaimed John Mortimer, when they were gone. "I had no notion that child had been neglected and left to pick up these pernicious superstitions, though I never liked his mother from the first moment I set my eyes on her."

"Why did you ask her to stay at your house then?" said Brandon, laughing.

"Giles, you know as well as I do."

Thereupon, having finished their breakfast, they set forth to walk to the town, arguing together on some subject that interested them till they reached the bank.

Behind it, in a comfortable room fitted up with library tables, leather chairs, and cases for books and papers, sat old Augustus Mortimer. "Grand," as he was always called by his descendants, that being easier to say than his full title of grandfather; and if John Mortimer had not taken Brandon into this room to see him, the talk about the ghost might have faded away altogether from the mind of the latter.

As it was, Grand asked after the little ones, and Brandon, standing on the rug and looking down on

the fine stern features and white head, began to give him a graphic account of what little Peter Melcombe had been teaching them, John Mortimer, while he unlocked his desk and sorted out certain papers, now and then adding a touch or two in mimicry of his children's little voices.

Old Augustus said nothing, but Brandon, to his great surprise, noticed that as the narrative went on it produced a marked effect upon him; he listened with suppressed eagerness, and then with a cogitative air as if he was turning the thing over in his mind.

The conclusion of the story, how Janie had said the name of the ghost was Melcombe, John Mortimer related, for Brandon by that time was keenly alive to the certainty that they were disturbing the old man much.

A short silence followed. John was still arranging his papers, then his father said deliberately,—

"This is the first hint I ever received of any presence being supposed to haunt the place."

The ghost itself had never produced the slightest effect on John Mortimer. All he thought of was the consequence of the tale on the minds of his children.

"I shall take care that little monkey does not

come here again in a hurry," he remarked, at the same time proceeding to mend a quill pen; his father watching him rather keenly, Brandon thought, from under his bushy, white eyebrows.

"Now, of all men," thought Brandon, "I never could have supposed that Grand was superstitious. I don't believe he is either; what does it mean?" and as there was still silence, he became so certain that Grand would fain ask some more questions but did not like to do so, that he said, in a careless tone, "That was all the children told us;" and thereupon, being satisfied and willing to change the subject, as Brandon thought, the old man said,—

"Does my brother dine at home to-day, St. George?"

"Yes, uncle; shall I tell him you will come over to dinner?"

"Well, my dear fellow, if you are sure it will be convenient to have me—it is a good while since I saw him—so you may."

"He will be delighted; shall I tell him you will stay the night?"

"Yes."

"Well done, father," said John, looking up. "I

am glad you are getting over the notion that you cannot sleep away from home. I'll come over to breakfast, St. George, and drive my father in."

"Do," said Brandon, taking his leave; and as he walked to the railway that was to take him home, he could not help still pondering on the effect produced by the mention of the ghost. He little supposed, however, that the ghost was at the bottom of this visit to his stepfather; but it was.

## CHAPTER VII.

### AN OLD MAN DIGS A WELL.

"And travel finishes the fool."
GAY.

MRS. PETER MELCOMBE, all unconscious of the unfavourable impression her son had made on his late host, continued to think a good deal of the agreeable widower. She made Peter write from time to time to little Janie Mortimer and report the progress of the puppy, at the same time taking care to mention his dear mamma in a manner that she thought would be advantageous.

It cost Peter a world of trouble to copy and recopy these epistles till his mother was satisfied with them; but she always told him that he would not be remembered so well or invited again unless he wrote; and this was true.

His little friends wrote in reply, but by no means such carefully-worded letters; they also favoured him

with shoals of Christmas cards and showers of valentines, but his letters never got beyond the schoolroom; and if John Mortimer's keen eyes had ever fallen on them, it would have availed nothing. He would have discovered at once that they were not the child's sole production, and would have been all the more decided not to invite him again.

When first Mrs. Melcombe came home she perceived a certain change in Laura, who was hardly able to attend to Peter's lessons, and had fits of elation that seemed to alternate with a curious kind of shame. Mrs. Peter Melcombe did not doubt that Laura fancied she had got another lover, but she was so tired of Laura's lovers that she determined to take no notice; and if Laura had anything to say, to make her say it without assistance. It seemed to her so right and natural and proper that she should wish to marry again herself, and so ridiculous of Laura to fancy that she wished to marry also.

On Valentine's day, however, Laura had a letter, flushed high, and while trying to look careless actually almost wept for joy; for the moment Mrs. Melcombe was thrown off her guard, and she asked a question.

Laura, in triumph, handed the valentine to her sister-in-law. "It's strange," she said tremulously, "very strange; but what is a woman to do when she is the object of such a passion?"

It was a common piece of paper with two coloured figures on it taking hands and smiling; underneath, in a clear and careful hand, was written—

"What would he give, your lover true,
Just for one little sight of you?
"J. S."

"J. S.?" said Mrs. Melcombe, in a questioning tone.

"It's Joseph, dear," replied Laura, hanging down her head and smiling.

Joseph was the head plumber who had been employed about the now finished house, and Mrs. Melcombe's dismay was great when she found that Joseph, having discovered how the young lady thought he was in love with her, was actually taking up the part of a lover, she dreaded to think what might occur in consequence. Joseph was a very clever young workman, of excellent character, and Laura was intolerably foolish and to the last degree credulous.

If the young man had been the greatest scamp and

villain, but in her own rank of life, it would have been nothing to compare with this, in the eyes of Mrs. Melcombe, or indeed in most people's eyes. She turned pale, and felt that she was a stricken woman.

She was not well educated herself, and she had not been accustomed to society, but she aspired to better things. The house was just finished, she had written to Mr. Mortimer to tell him so. She thought of giving a house-warming; for several of the families round, whose fathers and mothers had been kept at arms' length by old Madam Melcombe till their children almost forgot that there was such a person, had now begun kindly to call on the lonely ladies, and express a wish to see something of them.

Also she had been rubbing up her boarding-school French, and hoped to take a trip to Paris, for she wanted to give herself and her son all the advantages that could be got with money. She knew there was something provincial about herself and her sister-in-law, as there had been about the old grandmother; and indeed about all the Melcombes. She wished to rise; and oh what should she do, how could she ever get over it, if Laura married the plumber?

Her distress was such that she took the only course which could have availed her—she was silent.

"I was afraid, dear, you might, you would, you must think it very imprudent," said Laura, a little struck by this silence; "but what is to be done? Amelia, he's dying for me."

Still Mrs. Melcombe was silent.

"He told me himself, that if I wouldn't have him it would drive him to drink."

"Laura!" exclaimed Mrs. Melcombe with vehemence, "it's not credible that you can take up with a lout who courts you in such fashion as that. O Laura!" she exclaimed in such distress as to give real pathos to her manner, "I little thought to see this day, I could not have believed it of you;" and she burst into an agony of tears.

"And here's a letter," she presently found voice enough to say, "here's a letter from Mr. Mortimer, to say that his brother's coming to look at the house. Perhaps Mr. John Mortimer will come with him. Oh, what shall I do if they hear of this?"

Laura was very much impressed. If scorn, or anger, or incredulity had confronted her, she would have held to her intentions; but this alarm and grief at least had

the merit of allowing all importance to the affair, and consequently to her.

Her imagination conjured up visions of her sister-in-law's future years. She saw her always wringing her hands, and she was touched for her. "And then so happy as we meant to be, having a foreign tour, and seeing Paris, and so as we had talked it over together. And such friends as we always are."

This was perfectly true; Mrs. Melcombe and Laura were not of the nagging order of women, they never said sarcastic or ill-natured things to one another, the foibles of the one suited the other; and if they had a few uncomfortable words now and then between themselves, they had enough *esprit de corps* to hide this from all outsiders.

An affecting scene took place, Laura rose and threw herself into Amelia's arms weeping passionately.

"You'll give it up, Laura dear, for my sake, and for our poor dear Peter's sake, who's gone."

No; Laura could not go quite so far in heroic self-sacrifice as that; but she did promise solemnly, that however many times Joseph might say he was dying for her, she would—what? She would promise to decide nothing till she had been to Paris.

She was very happy that morning; Amelia had not made game of her, and there had been such a scene! Laura enjoyed a scene; and Amelia had pleaded so hard and so long with her for that promise. At last she had given it. If she had not been such a remarkably foolish woman, she would have known she was glad on the whole that the promise had been extorted from her. As it was she thought she was sorry, but after a little more urging and pleading she gave up the precious valentine, and saw it devoured by the flames. It had a Birmingham postmark, and Mrs. Melcombe heard with pleasure that Joseph would be away at least a fortnight.

Laura had wanted a little excitement, just the least amusement; and if not that, just the least recognition of her place in nature as a woman, and a young one. At present, her imagination had not been long at work on this unpromising payer of the tribute. If some one, whose household ways and daily English were like her own, had come forward she would soon have forgotten Joseph; for he himself, as an individual, was almost nothing to her, it was only in his having paid the tribute that his power lay.

Late in the afternoon Mr. Augustus Mortimer

arrived. He was received by Mrs. Melcombe almost, as it seemed, with the devotion of a daughter.

The room was strewed with account-books and cards. It had been intended that he should make some remark about them, and then she was to say, with careless ease, "Only the accounts of the parish charities." But he courteously feigning to see none of the litter, she was put out.

He presently went to inspect the repairs and restorations, to look over the garden and the stables; and it was not till the next morning that she found occasion to ask some advice of him.

The cottages on the land were let with the farms, so that the farmers put their labourers into them, charged, it is true, very little rent, but allowed them to get very much out of repair. It was the farmers' duty to keep them in repair; but there was no agent, no one to make them do it. Moreover, they would have it that no repairs worth mentioning were wanted. Did Mr. Mortimer think if she spent the money she had devoted to charity in repairing these cottages, she could fairly consider that she had spent it in charity?

It was a nice point, certainly, for it would be improving her son's property, and avoiding disputes

with valuable and somewhat unmanageable tenants; and, on the other hand, it would be escaping the bad precedent of paying for repairs out of the estate; so she went on laying this casuistry before the old man while he pulled down his shaggy white brows, and looked very stern over the whole affair. "Some of the poor old women do suffer so sadly from rheumatism," she continued, "and our parish doctor says it comes from the damp places they live in, and then there is so much fever in the lower part of the hamlet."

"You had better let me see the farmers and the cottagers," said old Augustus. "I will go into the whole affair, and tell you what I think of it."

Accordingly he went his way among the people, and if he had any sorrowful reason for being glad of what rendered it his duty to pick up all the information he could, this did not make him less energetic in fighting the farmers.

Very little, however, could be done with them; an obvious hole in a roof they would repair, a rotting door they would replace, but that was all, and he felt strongly the impolicy of taking money out of the estate to do all the whitewashing, plastering, car-

penters' work, and painting that were desirable; besides which, he was sure the water was not pure that the people drank, and that they ought to have another well.

When Mrs. Melcombe heard his report of it all, and when he acknowledged that he could do hardly anything with the farmers, she wished she had not asked his advice, particularly as he chose to bring certain religious remarks into it. He was indeed a most inconveniently religious man; his religion was of a very expensive kind, and was all mixed up with his philanthropy, as if one could not be religious at all without loving those whom God loved, and as if one could not love them without serving them to the best of one's power.

She listened with dismay. If it was useless to expect much of the farmers, and impolitic to take much out of the estate, what was the use of talking? But Mr. Augustus Mortimer did talk for several minutes; first he remarked on the expressed wish of his mother that all needful repairs should be attended to, then he said his brother began to feel the infirmities of age, and also was a poor man; then he made Mrs. Melcombe wince by observing that the condition

of the tenements was perfectly disgraceful, and next he went on to say that, being old himself, he did not wish to waste any time, for he should have but little, and therefore as he was rich he was content to do what was wanted himself.

"This house," he continued, "is a great deal too large for the small income your son will have. Very large sums have been spent, as the will directed, in putting it into perfect repair. I am not surprised, therefore, that you have felt perplexed, but now, if you have no objection, I will have estimates made at once."

Excessively surprised, a little humiliated, but yet, on the whole, conscious that such an offer relieved her of a great responsibility, Mrs. Peter Melcombe hesitated a moment, then said in a low voice—

"Thank you, Mr. Mortimer, but you will give me a little time to think of this."

"Certainly," he answered, with all composure, "till to-morrow morning;" then he went on as if that matter was quite settled, and enough had been said about it. "There is one person whom I should much like to point out to you as an object for your charity—the old shepherd's wife who is bedridden.

If you were inclined to provide some one to look after her——"

"Oh, Becky Maddison," interrupted Mrs. Melcombe; "the dear grandmother did not approve of that woman. She used to annoy her by telling an absurd ghost story."

"Indeed!"

"But still, as you think I ought to do something for her, I certainly will."

"I shall go and see her myself this afternoon," answered Mr. Augustus Mortimer hastily. "I will not fail to report to you how I find her."

"Her talk was naturally painful to the dear grandmother," continued Mrs. Melcombe.

Mr. Mortimer looked keenly attentive, but he did not ask any question, and as she said no more, he almost immediately withdrew, and walked straight across the fields to the cottage of this old woman.

Nothing more was said that evening concerning the repairs, or concerning this visit; but the next morning Mr. Mortimer renewed his proposition, and after a little modest hesitation, she accepted it; then, remembering his request concerning old Becky, she told him she had that morning sent her a blanket and

some soup. "And, by-the-bye, Mr. Mortimer, did she tell you the story that used to annoy the dear grandmother?" she inquired.

Mr. Mortimer was so long in answering, that she looked up at him, and when he caught her eye he answered "Yes."

"He doesn't like it any more than his mother did," she thought, so she said no more, and he almost immediately went away to give orders about the proposed estimates.

Mrs. Melcombe and Laura made Mr. Mortimer very comfortable, and when he went away he left them highly pleased, for, having been told of their intended journey to Paris, he had proposed to them to come and spend a few days at his house, considering it the first stage of their tour.

So he departed, and no more dirt was thrown at him. The tide began to turn in favour of the Mortimers, people had seen the mild face and venerable gentleness of the Mortimer who was poor, they had now handled the gold of the one that was rich.

"Old Madam was a saint," they observed, "but she couldn't come and look arter us *hersen*, poor dear. Farmers are *allers* hard on poor folk. So he

was bent on having another well atop o' the hill 'stead o' the bottom. Why let him, then, if he liked! Anyhow, there was this good in it—the full buckets would be to carry down hill 'stead of up. As to the water o' the ould well being foul and breeding fevers, it might be, and then again it might not be; if folks were to be for ever considering whether water was foul, they'd never drink in peace!"

The moment he was gone, Mrs. Melcombe turned her thoughts to Laura's swain, and excited such hopes of pleasure from the visit to Paris in the mind of her sister-in-law, that Joseph's devotion began to be less fascinating to her, besides which there was something inexpressibly sweet to her imaginative mind in the notion of being thwarted and watched. She pictured to herself the fine young man haunting the lonely glen, hoping to catch a sight of her, and smiting his brow as men do in novels, sighing and groaning over his lowly birth and his slender means. She wished Joseph would write that her sister-in-law might rob her of the letter; but Joseph didn't write, he knew better. At the end of the fortnight he appeared; coming to church, and sitting in full view of the ladies, looking not half so well in his shining Sunday clothes of

Birmingham make, as he had done in his ordinary working suit.

Laura was a good deal out of countenance, but Mrs. Melcombe perceived, not without surprise, that while she felt nothing but a feminine exultation in being admired, the young man's homage was both deep and real. Nothing was either fancied or feigned.

So by Monday morning Mrs. Melcombe had got ready a delightful plan to lay before Laura—she actually offered to take her to London, and fired her imagination with accounts of the concerts, the theatres, and all that they were to do and see.

No mortal plumber could hold his own against such a sister-in-law. Laura let herself be carried off without having any interview with Joseph, who began to think "it was a bad job," and did not know how his supposed faithless lady wept during the railway journey. But then he did not know how completely when she went to her first oratorio she was delighted and consoled.

The longer they stayed in London the more delighted they were; so was Peter; the Polytechnic alone was worth all the joys of the country put together; but when they came back again at the end of

April, and all the land was full of singing-birds, and the trees were in blossom, and the sweet smiling landscape looked so full of light, and all was so fresh and still, then the now absent Joseph got hold of Laura's imagination again; she went and gazed at the window that he had been glazing, when, as she passed, he lifted up his fine eyes and looked at her in such a particular manner.

What really had taken place was this. Joseph, with a lump of putty in his palm, was just about to dig a bit out of it with a knife that he held in his other hand. Laura passed, and when the young man looked up, she affected to feel confused, and turned away her face with a sort of ridiculous self-consciousness. Joseph was surprised, and the knife held suspended in his hand, he was staring at her when she glanced again, and naturally he was a little put out of countenance.

So Laura now walked about the place, recalled the romantic past, and if Joseph had appeared (which he did not, because he had no means of knowing that she had returned), it is highly doubtful whether Laura would ever have seen Paris.

As it was, with sighs and smiles, with regrets over

a dead nosegay that the young man had given her, and with eager longings to see Paris, and perhaps Geneva, Laura spent the next fortnight, and then, taking leave of Melcombe again, was received in due time by Mr. Augustus Mortimer on the steps of his house, his son being with him.

It was nearly dinner-time, she and her sister-in-law were delighted to meet this gentleman, and find that he was going to dine that day with his father. Peter, too, was as happy as a king, for he hoped Mr. John Mortimer would and could give him information concerning all the well-remembered puppies, kittens, magpies, and white mice that he had made acquaintance with during his happy visit to the little Mortimers.

Mr. Augustus Mortimer's house was just outside the small town of Wigfield; it appeared to be quite in the country, because it was on the slope of a hill, and was so well backed up with trees that not a chimney could be seen from any of its windows. It was built with its back to the town, and commanded a pretty view over field, wood, and orchard, and also over its own beautiful lawn and slightly-sloping garden, which was divided from some rich meadows by the

same little river that ran, nearly two miles further on, past the bottom of John Mortimer's garden. "And there," said John Mortimer, after dinner, pointing out a chimney which could be seen against the sky, just over the tops of some trees—"there lives my uncle Daniel, in a house which belongs to his stepson, Giles Brandon; his house is just two miles from this, and mine is two miles from each of them, so that we form a triangle."

Mr. Mortimer's daughter came the next day to call on the relatives from Melcombe; she brought his step-daughters with her; and these young ladies when they returned home gave their step-brothers a succinct account of the impressions they had received.

"Provincial, both of them. The married one looks like a faded piece of wax-work. Laura Melcombe is rather pretty, but unless she is a goose, her manners, voice, and whole appearance do her the greatest injustice possible."

Mrs. Melcombe and Laura also gave judgment in the same manner when these visitors were gone.

"Mrs. Henfrey looks quite elderly. She must be several years past fifty; but I liked her kind, slow way of talking; and what a handsome gown she had

on, Laura, real lace on it, and a real Maltese lace shawl!"

"She has a good jointure," said Laura; "she can afford to dress well. The girls, the Miss Grants, have graceful, easy manners, just the kind of manners I should like to have; but I can't say I thought much of their dress. I am sure those muslins must have been washed several times. In fact, they were decidedly shabby. I think it odd and old-fashioned of them always to call Mrs. Henfrey 'Sister.'"

"I do not see that; she is older than their mother was; they could not well address her by her Christian name. They do not seem to be a marrying family, and that is odd, as their mother married three times. The Grants are the children of the second marriage, are they not?"

"Yes; but three times! Did she marry three times? Ah, I remember—how shocking!"

"Shocking," exclaimed Mrs. Melcombe, "O, Laura, I consider it quite irreligious of you to say that."

Laura laughed. "But only think," she observed, "what a number of names one must remember in consequence of her three marriages. First, there is Uncle Daniel's own daughter, Mrs. Henfrey; I do

not mind her; but then there is Mr. Brandon, the son of Aunt Mortimer's first husband; then these Grants, the children of her second husband; and then Valentine, uncle's son and hers by this third marriage. It's a fatigue only to think of them all!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THEY MEET AN AUTHOR.

"People may be taken in *once*, who imagine that an author is greater in private life than other men. Uncommon parts require uncommon opportunities for their exertion."

DR. JOHNSON.

MRS. HENFREY in taking leave of Amelia had expressed her pleasure at the prospect of shortly seeing her again. They were all coming by invitation to lunch, the next day, at her Uncle Augustus Mortimer's house, because in the afternoon there was to be a horticultural show in the town. They always went to these shows, she continued, and this one would have a particular interest for them, as John Mortimer's gardener, who had once been their gardener, was to carry off the first prize. "And if you ask him what the prize is for," said one of the girls, "he will tell you it is for 'airly 'tates.'"

Accordingly the next day there was a gathering of Mortimers and heir families. Augustus Mortimer was

not present, he generally took his luncheon at the bank; but his son John, to Peter's delight, appeared with the twins, and constituting himself master of the ceremonies, took the head of the table, and desired his cousin Valentine to take the other end, and make himself useful.

Peter asked after his little love, Anastasia.

"Oh, she is very happy," said Gladys Mortimer; "she and Janie have got a WASH."

"Got what?" asked Mrs. Henfrey.

"A wash, sister," said Valentine. "I passed through the garden, and saw them with lots of tiny dolls' clothes that they had been washing in the stream spread out to bleach on the grass."

"It's odd," observed Brandon, "that so wise as children are, they should be fond of imitating us who are such fools."

"Janie has been drawing from the round, in imitation of her sisters," observed John Mortimer. "She brought me this morning a portrait of a flat tin cock, lately bought for a penny, and said, 'I drew him from the round, father.'"

By this time the dishes were uncovered and the servants had withdrawn. Laura was very happy at

first. She had been taken in to luncheon by the so-called St. George, he was treating her with a sort of deference that she found quite to her mind, and she looked about her on these newly-known relatives and connections with much complacency. There was John Mortimer, with Amelia at his right hand, in the place of honour; then there were the two Miss Grants (in fresh muslin dresses), with a certain Captain Walker between them, whose twin brother, as Laura understood, had married their elder sister. This military person was insignificant in appearance and small of stature, but he was very attentive to both the young ladies. Then there was Valentine, looking very handsome, between Mrs. Henfrey and Miss Christie Grant, and being rebuked by one and advised by the other as to his carving, for he could not manage the joint before him, and was letting it slip about in the dish and splash the white sauce.

"You must give your mind to it more," said Mrs. Henfrey, "and try to hit the joints."

"It's full of bones," exclaimed Valentine in a deeply-injured voice.

"Well, laddie," said Miss Christie, "and if I'm not mistaken, ye'll find when you get more used

to carving, that à breast of veal always is full of bones."

"Nobody must take any notice of him till he has finished," said Brandon. "Put up a placard on the table, 'You are requested not to speak to the man at the veal.' Now, Aunt Christie, you should say, 'aweel, aweel,' you often do so when there seems no need to correct me."

"Isn't it wonderful," observed Valentine, "that he can keep up his spirits as he does, when only last week he was weighed in the columns of the *Wigfield Advertiser and True Blue*, and expressly informed that he was found wanting."

"If you would only let politics alone," observed Mrs. Henfrey, "the *True Blue* would never interfere with you. I always did hate politics," she continued, with peaceable and slow deliberation.

"They are talking of some Penny Readings that St. George has been giving," said John Mortimer, for he observed a look of surprise on Laura's face.

"'Our poet,' though, has let him alone lately," remarked Valentine. "Oh I wish somebody would command Barbara to repeat his last effusion. I am

sure by the look in her eyes that she knows it by heart."

"We all do," said John Mortimer's eldest daughter.

"Ah! it's a fine thing to be a public character," observed her father; "but even I aspire to some notice from the *True Blue* next week in consequence of having old Nicholas for my gardener."

"I am very fond of poetry," said Laura simpering. "I should like to hear the poem you spoke of."

Thereupon the little girl immediately repeated the following verses:—

"If, dear friends, you've got a penny
(If you haven't steal one straight),
Go and buy the best of any
Penn'orth that you've bought of late.

"At the schoolroom as before
(Up May Lane), or else next door
(As last Monday) at the Boar,
Hear the Wigfield lion roar.

"What a treat it was, good lack!
Though my bench had ne'er a back,
With a mild respectful glee
There to hear, and that to see.

"Sweetly slept the men and boys,
And the girls, they sighed meanwhile
'O my goodness, what a voice!
O my gracious, what a smile!'"

The man with no ear for music feels his sense of justice outraged when people shudder while his

daughter sings. Why won't they listen to her songs as to one another's? There is no difference.

With a like feeling those who have hardly any sense of humour are half-offended when others laugh, while they seem to be shut out for not perceiving any cause. Occasionally knowing themselves to be sensible people, they think it evident that their not seeing the joke must be because it is against them.

Laura and Mrs. Melcombe experienced a certain discomfort here. Neither would have been so rude as to laugh; in fact, what was there to laugh at? They were shut out not only from the laugh, but from that state of feeling which made these cousins, including the victim, enjoy it, against one of themselves.

As for Mrs. Henfrey, who also was without any perception of the humorous side of things, she looked on with a beaming countenance; pleased with them all for being in such good spirits, whatever might be the reason, for, as she always expressed it, she did so love to see young people happy.

"It's capital," said John, but not so good as the prose reviewing they give you; and all this most excellent fun we should lose, you know, Giles, if you might have your way, and all sorts of criticism

and reviewing had to be signed with the writer's name."

"But it would make the thing much more fair and moderate," said Brandon "(not that I intended to include such little squibs as this); besides, it would secure a man against being reviewed by his own rivals—or his enemies."

"Yes," said Valentine; "but that sort of thing would tell both ways."

As he spoke with great gravity Mrs. Melcombe, mainly in the kind hope of helping dear Laura's mistake into the background, asked with an air of interest what he meant.

"Well," said Valentine, with calm audacity, "to give an example. Suppose a man writes something, call it anything you please—call it a lecture if you like—say that it is partly political, and that it is published by request; and suppose further that somebody, name unknown, writes an interesting account of its scope and general merits, and it is put into some periodical—you can call it anything you please—say a county paper, for instance. The author is set in the best light, and the reviewer brings forward also some of his own views, which is quite fair—"

As he seemed to be appealing to Laura, Laura said, "Yes; perfectly fair."

"His own views—on—on the currency or anything else you like to mention." Here John Mortimer asked Mrs. Melcombe if she would take some more wine, Valentine proceeding gravely: "Now do you or do you not think that if that review had been signed by the lecturer's father, brother, or friend almost as intimate as a brother, it would have carried more weight or less in consequence?"

As several of them smiled, Mrs. Melcombe immediately felt uncomfortable again.

"If what he said was true," she said, "I cannot exactly see——" and here she paused.

"Well," said John Mortimer, observing that the attention of his keen-witted little daughter was excited, and being desirous, it seemed, to give a plainer example of what it all meant, "let us say now, for once, that I am a poet. I send out a new book, and sit quaking. The first three reviews appear. Given in little they read thus:—

"One. 'He copied from Snooks, whose immortal work, "The Loves of the Linendraper," is a comfort and a joy to our generation.'

"Two. 'He has none of the culture, the spontaneity, the suavity, the reticence, the *abandon*, the heating power, the cooling power, the light, the shade, or any of the other ingredients referred to by the great Small in his noble work on poesy.'

"Three. 'This man doesn't know how to write his own language.'

"As I am a poet, fancy my state of mind! I am horribly cast down; don't like to go out to dinner; am sure my butler, having read these reviews, despises me as an impostor; but while I sit sulking, in comes a dear friend and brother-poet. 'How do you know,' says he, 'that Snooks didn't write number one himself? Or perhaps one of his clique did, for whom he is to do the same thing.' I immediately shake hands with him. This is evidently his candid opinion, and I love candour in a friend; besides, we both hate Snooks. 'And it is a well-known fact,' he continues with friendly warmth, 'that Small's great work won't sell; how do you know that number two was not written by a brother or friend of the publisher's, by way of an advertisement for it?' By this time I am almost consoled. Something strikes me with irresistible force. I remember that that fellow Smith,

who contested with me the election for the borough of Wigfield in eighteen hundred and fifty or sixty, has taken to literature. He was at the head of the poll on that occasion, but my committee proving that he bribed, he lost his seat. I came in. It was said that I bribed too; but to discuss that now would be out of place. I feel sure that Smith must have written number three. In fact he said those very words concerning me on the hustings."

"Gladys," said Brandon, observing the child's deep attention, "it is right you should know that the brother-poet had written a tragedy on tin-tacks. Your father reviewed it, and said no family ought to be without it."

"But you didn't bribe father, and you didn't copy from Snooks, I am sure," said Gladys, determined to defend her father, even in his assumed character.

"What was the name of your *thing*, papa?" asked Barbara.

"I don't know, my dear, I have not considered that matter."

"It was called 'The Burglar's Betrothal,'" said Valentine.

"And do you think that Snooks really wrote that

review?" she continued, contemplating her father through her eyeglass, for she was shortsighted.

"If you ask my sincere opinion, my dear, I must say that I think he did not; but if some other man had signed it, I should have been sure. Which now I never shall be."

Here the door was slowly opened, and the portly butler appeared, bearing in his own hands a fine dish of potatoes; from the same plot, he remarked to John, with those that had obtained the prize. The butler looked proud.

"I feel as much elated," said John, "as if I had raised them myself. Is Nicholas here?"

"Yes, sir, and he has been saying that if the soil of your garden could only be kept dry, they would be finer still."

"Dry!" exclaimed Valentine, "you can't keep anything dry in such a climate as this—not even your jokes."

"Hear, hear!" said John Mortimer; "if the old man was not a teetotaler, and I myself were not so nearly concerned in this public recognition of *our* merits, I should certainly propose his health."

"Don't let such considerations sway you," ex-

claimed Valentine rising. "Jones, will you tell him that you left me on my legs, proposing his health in ginger-pop—'Mr. Nicholas Swan.'"

Mr. Nicholas Swan. Not one word of the ridiculous speech which followed the toast was heard by Laura, nor did she observe the respectful glee with which the butler retired, saying, "I think we've got a rise out of the *True Blue* now, sir. I'm told, sir, that the potatoes shown by the *other side*, compared with these, seemed no bigger than bullets."

Mr. Nicholas Swan. A sudden beating at the heart kept Mrs. Melcombe silent, and as for Laura, she had never blushed so deeply in her life. Joseph's name was Swan, and it flashed into her mind in an instant that he had told her his father was a gardener.

She sat lost in thought, and nervous, scarcely able to answer when some casual remark was made to her, and the meal was over before she had succeeded in persuading herself that this man could not be Joseph's father, because her coming straight to the place where he lived was *too* improbable.

"There goes Swanny across the lawn, father," said one of the twins, and thereupon they all went to the bow-window, and calling the old man, began to con-

gratulate him, while he leaned his arms on the window-frame, which was at a convenient height from the ground, and gave them an account of his success.

They grouped themselves on the seats near. Mrs. Melcombe took the chair pushed up for her where, as John Mortimer said, she could see the view. Laura followed, having snatched up a book of photographs, with which she could appear to be occupied, for she did not want to attract the gardener's attention by sitting farther than others did from the window; and as she mechanically turned the leaves, she hearkened keenly to Swan's remarks, and tried to decide that he was not like Joseph.

"The markiss, sir? Yes, sir, his gardener, Mr. Fergus, took the best prize for strawberries and green peas. You'll understand that those airly tates were from seedlings of my own—that's where their great merit lies, and why they were first. They gave Blakis the cottagers' prize for lettuce; that I uphold was wrong. Said I, 'Those lettuce heads that poor Raby shows air the biggest ever I set my eyes on.' 'Swan,' says Mr. Tikey, 'we must encourage them that has good characters.' 'Well, now, if you come to think, sir,' says I, 'it's upwards of ten years since Raby stole

that pair of boots,' and I say (though they was my boots) that should be forgot now, and he should have the cottagers' prize, but stealing never gets forgiven."

"Because it's such an inconvenient vice to those that have anything to lose," said Miss Christie.

"Yes, that's just it, ma'am. You see the vices and virtues have got overhauled again, and sorted differently to suit our convenience. Stealing's no worse *probly* in the eyes of our Maker than lying and slandering; not so bad, mayhap, as a deep *sweer*. But folks air so tenacious like, they must have every stick and stone respected that they reckon theirs."

"We shouldn't hear ye talking in this *pheelosophical* way," said Miss Christie, "if yere new potatoes had been stolen last night, before ye got them to the show."

Laura took a glance at the gardener, as, with all the ease of intimacy, he leaned in at the window and gave his opinion on things in general. He was hale, and looked about sixty years of age. He was dressed in his Sunday suit, and wore an orange bandana handkerchief loosely tied round his neck. He had keen grey eyes. Joseph's eyes were dark and large, and Joseph was taller, and had a straighter nose.

"Swan's quite right," remarked Valentine; "we are a great deal too tenacious about our belongings. Now I've heard of a fellow who was waiting about, to horsewhip another fellow, and when this last came out he had a cane in his hand. His enemy snatched it from him, and laid it about his back as much as he liked, split it and broke it on him, and then carried off the bits. Now what would you have done, Swan, in such a case?"

"Well, sir, in which case? I can't consider anyhow as I could be in the case of him that was whipped."

"I mean what would you have done about the cane?—the property? A magistrate had to decide. The man that had been horsewhipped said the other had spoilt his cane, which was as good as new, and then had stolen it. The other said he did not carry off the cane till it had been so much used that it was good for nothing, and he didn't call that stealing."

"Well, sir," said Mr. Swan, observing a smile on the face of one and another, "I think I'll leave that there magistrate to do the best he can with that there case, and I'll abide by his decision."

"When ye come out in the character of Apollo," said Miss Christie to Valentine, "ye should compose yourself into a grander attitude, and not sit all of a heap while ye're drawing the long-bow. Don't ye agree with me, Mrs. Melcombe?"

Mrs. Melcombe looked up and smiled uneasily; but the gardener had no uncomfortable surmises respecting her, as she had respecting him, and when he caught her eye he straightened himself up, and said with pleasant civility, while putting on his hat on purpose to touch it and take it off again, "'Servant, ma'am; my son Joseph has had a fine spell of work, as I hear from him, at your place since I saw you last autumn, and a beautiful place it is, I'm told."

Mrs. Melcombe answered this civil speech, and John Mortimer said, "How is Joseph getting on, Swan?"

"Getting on first-rate, thank you kindly, sir," replied Swan, leaning down into his former easy attitude, and keeping his Sunday hat under his arm. "That boy, though I say it, allers was as steady as old Time. He's at Birmingham now. I rather expect he'll be wanting to *settle* shortly."

As he evidently wished to be asked a further question, Mrs. Henfrey did ask one.

"No, ma'am, no," was the reply; "he have not told me nor his mother the young woman's name; but he said if he got her he should be the luckiest fellow that ever was." Here, from intense confusion and shyness, Laura dropped the book, St. George picked it up for her, and nobody thought of connecting the fall with the story, the unconscious Nicholas continuing. "So thereby his mother judged that it would come to something, for that's what a young chap mostly says when he has made up his mind; but I shall allers say, sir," he went on, "that with the good education as I gave him, it's a pity he took to such a poor trade. He airly showed a bent for it; I reckon it was the putty that got the better of him."

"Ah," said John Mortimer, "and I only wonder, Swan, that it didn't get the better of me! I used to lay out a good deal of pocket-money in it at one time, and many a private smash have I perpetrated in the panes of out-houses, and at the back of the conservatory, that I might afterwards mend them with my own putty and tools. I can remember my

father's look of pride and pleasure when he would pass and find me so quietly, and, as he thought, so meritoriously employed."

And now this ordeal was over. The gardener was suffered to depart, and the ladies went up-stairs to dress for the flower-show.

"Oh, Amelia!" exclaimed Laura, pressing her cold hands to her burning cheeks, "I feel as if I almost hated that man. What business had he to talk of Joseph in that way?"

Amelia, on the contrary, was very much pleased with Swan, because he had clearly shown that he was ignorant of this affair. "He seems a very respectable person," she replied. "His cottage, I know, is near the end of John Mortimer's garden. I've seen it; but I never thought of asking his name. It certainly would be mortifying for you to have to go and stay there with him and Joseph's mother. I suppose, though, that the Mortimers would have to call."

Amelia felt a certain delight in presenting this picture to Laura.

"I would never go near them!" exclaimed Laura, very angry with her sister-in-law.

"Why not?" persisted Amelia, determined to make Laura see things as they were. "You could not possibly wish to divide a man from his own family; they have never injured you."

"Oh that he and I were on a desert island together," said Laura. She had often said that before to Amelia. She now felt that if Joseph's father and mother were there also, and there was nobody else to see, she should not mind their presence; besides, it would be convenient, they would act almost as servants.

Amelia very seldom had intuitions; but one seemed to visit her then. "Do you know, Laura, it really seems to me *less shocking* that you should be attached to Joseph (if you are, which I don't believe), than that you should be so excessively ashamed of it, with no better cause."

This she said quite sincerely, having risen for the moment into a clearer atmosphere than that in which she commonly breathed. It was a great advance for her; but then, on the other hand, she had never felt so easy about the result as that old man's talk had now made her. Laura never could do it!

So off they set to the flower-show, which was held

under a large tent in a field. Laura heard the hum and buzz about her; the jolly wives of the various gardeners and florists admiring their husbands' prizes; the band of the militia playing outside; Brandon's delightful voice—how she wished that Joseph's was like it!—all affected her imagination; together with the strong scent of flowers and strawberries and trodden grass, and the mellow light let down over them through the tent, and the moving flutter of dresses and ribbons as the various ladies passed and repassed, almost all being adorned with little pink and blue flowers, if only so much as a rose-bud or a forget-me-not—for a general election was near, and they were "showing their colours" (a custom once almost universal, and which was still kept up in that old-fashioned place).

Wigfield was a droll little town, and in all its ways was intensely English. There was hardly a woman in it or round it who really and intelligently concerned herself about politics; but they were all "blues" or "pinks," and you might hear them talk for a week together without finding out which was the Liberal and which was the Conservative colour; but the "pinks" all went to the pink shops, and the

"blues" would have thought it WRONG not to give their custom to those tradesmen who voted "blue."

You might send to London for anything you thought you wanted; but the Marchioness herself, the only great lady in the neighbourhood, knew better than to order anything in Wigfield from a shop of the wrong colour.

The "pinks" that day were happy. "Markiss," in the person of his gardener, had three prizes; "Old Money-Bags" (Mr. Augustus Mortimer's name at election time) had two prizes, in the person of his son's gardener; in fact, the "pinks" triumphed almost at the rate of two to one, and yet, to their immortal honour, let it be recorded that the "blues" said it was all fair.

John Mortimer shortly went to fetch his father, and returned with him and all his own younger children. Mr. Mortimer had long been allowed to give three supplementary prizes, on his own account, to some of the exhibitors who were cottagers, and on this occasion his eyes, having been duly directed by his son, were observed to rest with great admiration on the big lettuces. Raby's wife could hardly believe it when she saw the bright sovereign laid on the broad top

of one of them; while Mr. Swan, as one of the heroes of the day, and with Mrs. Swan leaning on his arm, looked on approvingly, the latter wearing a black silk gown and a shawl covered with fir-cones. She was a stout woman, and had been very pretty—she was supposed by her husband to be so still. On this occasion, pointing out the very biggest and brightest bunch of cut-flowers he saw, Mr. Swan remarked complacently—

"They remind me of you, Maria."

"And which on 'em came from our garden, dear," said Mrs. Swan, meaning which came from Mr. John Mortimer's garden.

Swan pointed out several. "Mr. Fergus came to me yesterday, and said he, 'We want a good lot of flowers to dress up the tent. You'll let us have some?' 'Certain,' said I; 'we allers do.' Then he marches up to my piccotees. 'Now these,' said he, 'would just suit us. We could do very well with pretty nigh all of 'em.' 'Softly,' said I; 'flowers you'll have; but leave the rest to me. If I'm to have one of my teeth drawn, it's fair I should say which.' Yes, William Raby air improved; but I shall allers say as nothing ever can raise that idle dog Phil.

Raby. I don't hope for folks that take parish pay."

The said William Raby came in the evening and brought the big vegetables, wrapped in an old newspaper, for Mr. Mortimer's acceptance, and when the old man came out into his hall to speak to him, Raby said—

"It wer' not only the money. My wife, *her* feels, too—when a man's been down so long—as it does him a sight o' good to get a mouthful o' pride, and six penn'orth o' praise to make him hold his head up."

"St. George was dull yesterday," observed John Mortimer, when he and his father were alone the next morning in the bank parlour. "He was not like himself; he flashed out now and then, but I could see that it was an effort to him to appear in good spirits. I thought he had got over that attachment, for he seemed jolly enough some time ago."

"When does he sail for Canada?" asked the old man.

"At the end of this week, and I believe mainly for the sake of having something to do. It is very much to be lamented that my uncle did not manage to make him take up some profession. Here are his fine

talents almost wasted; and, besides that, while he is running about on his philanthropic schemes, Valentine steals the heart of the girl he loves."

"But," said his father, "I think the young fellow is quite unconscious that St. George likes her."

"My dear father, then he has no business to be. He ought to know that such a thing is most probable. Here is St. George shipwrecked, floating on a raft, and half starved, when this impudent little yacht, that seems, by the way she flies about, to know the soundings of all harbours by special intuition—this impudent little yacht comes and looks round the corner of every wave, and actually overhauls the high seas till she finds him, and there the first time he opens his eyes is that sweet, quaint piece of innocence leaning over him. He is shut up with her for ten days or so; she is as graceful as a sylph, and has a tender sort of baby face that's enough to distract a man, and I don't see how he could possibly leave that vessel without being in love with her, unless some other woman had already got hold of his heart. No, even if St. George did not know himself that he cared for her, he ought to have been allowed time to find it out before any one else spoke. And there is Val in

constant correspondence with her, and as secure as possible!"

Conversation then turned to the Melcombes. Old Augustus spoke uneasily of the boy, said he looked pale, and was not grown.

"He gets that pallor from his mother," said John. "I should not like to see any of my children such complete reproductions of either parent as that boy is of her. Family likeness is always strongest among the uncultivated, and among lethargic and stupid people. If you go down into the depths of the country, to villages, where the parents hardly think at all, and the children learn next to nothing, you'll find whole families of them almost exactly alike, excepting in size."

His father listened quietly, but with the full intention of bringing the conversation back to Peter as soon as he could.

"It is the same with nations," proceeded John, "those who have little energy and no keen desire for knowledge are ten times more alike in feature, complexion, and countenance than we are. No! family likeness is all very well in infancy, before the mind has begun to work on the face; but as a man's

children grow, they ought to be less and less alike every year."

"That little fellow," said the father, "seems to me to be exactly like what he was a year ago."

"I observe no change."

"Do you think he is an average child, John?"

John laughed. "I think that little imp of mine, Hughie, could thrash him, if they chose to fight, and he is nearly three years the younger of the two. No, I do not think he is an average child; but I see nothing the matter with him."

Grand was not exempt from the common foibles of grandfathers, and he was specially infatuated in favour of the little Hugh, who was a most sweet-tempered and audacious child, and when his son went on, "Those two little scamps are getting so troublesome, that they will have to be sent to school very shortly," he said, almost in a grumbling tone, "They're always good enough when they're with *me*."

So, in course of time, Mrs. and Miss Melcombe set forth on their travels; it was their ambition to see exactly the same places and things that everybody else goes to see, and they made just such observations on them as everybody else makes.

In the meantime Brandon, not at all aware that several people besides John Mortimer had noticed that he was out of spirits—Brandon also prepared to set forth on his travels. He had persuaded several families to emigrate, and had also persuaded himself that he must go to their destination himself, that he might look out for situations for them, and settle them before the winter came on. He was very busy for some days arranging his affairs; he meant to be away some time. Mr. Mortimer knew it—perhaps he knew more, for he said not a word by way of dissuasion, but only seemed rather depressed. The evening, however, before Brandon was to start, as, at about eight o'clock, he sat talking with his step-father, the old man lifted up his head and said to him—

"You find me quite as clear in my thoughts and quite as well able to express them as usual, don't you, St. George?"

"Yes," answered the step-son, feeling, however, a little dismayed, for the wistful earnestness with which this was said was peculiar.

"If you should ever be asked," continued Daniel Mortimer, "you would be able to say that you had

seen no signs of mental decay in me these last few months?"

"Yes, I should."

"Don't disturb yourself, my dear fellow. I am as well as usual; better since my illness than I was for some time before. I quite hope to see you again; but in case I do not, I have a favour to ask of you."

The step-son assured him with all affection and fervour that he would attend to his wish, whatever it might be.

"I have never loved anything that breathed as I loved your mother," continued the old man, as if still appealing to him, "and you could hardly have been dearer to me if you had been my own."

"I know it," said Brandon.

"When you were in your own study this morning at the top of the house——"

"Yes, my liege?"

"I sent Valentine up to you with a desk. You were in that room, were you not?"

"Oh, yes."

"A small desk, that was once your mother's—it has a Bramah lock."

"I noticed that it had, and that it was locked."

"What have you done with it?"

"Valentine said you wished me to take particular care of it, so I locked it into my cabinet, where my will is, as you know, and where are most of my papers."

"Thank you; here is the key. You think you shall never forget where that desk is, Giles?"

"Never! such a thing is quite impossible."

"If I am gone when you return, you are to open that desk. You will find in it a letter which I wrote about three years ago; and if I have ever deserved well of you and yours, I charge you and I implore you to do your very best as regards what I have asked of you in that letter."

## CHAPTER IX.

### SIGNED "DANIEL MORTIMER."—CANADA.

"The logs burn red; she lifts her head
For sledge-bells tinkle and tinkle, O lightly swung.
'Youth was a pleasant morning, but ah! to think 'tis fled,
Sae lang, lang syne,' quo' her mother, 'I, too, was young.'

"No guides there are but the North star,
And the moaning forest tossing wild arms before,
The maiden murmurs, 'O sweet were yon bells afar,
And hark! hark! hark! for he cometh, he nears the door.'

"Swift north-lights show, and scatter and go.
How can I meet him, and smile not, on this cold shore?
Nay, I will call him, 'Come in from the night and the snow,
And love, love, love in the wild wood, wander no more.'"

AN hour after the conversation between Brandon and old Daniel Mortimer, they parted, and nothing could be more unlike than his travels were and those of the Melcombes. First, there was Newfoundland to be seen. It looked at a distance like a lump of perfectly black hill embedded in thick layers of cotton wool; then as the vessel approached, there was its harbour, which though the year was nearly half over, was crackling all over with brittle ice. Then

there was Halifax Bay, blue as a great sapphire, full of light, and swarming with the spawn of fish. And there was the Bras d'Or, boats all along this yellow spit of sand, stranded, with their sails set and scarcely flapping in the warm still air; and then there was the port where he was to meet his emigrants, for they had not crossed in the same ship with him; and after that there were wild forests and unquiet waters far inland, where all night the noise of the "lumber" was heard as it leaped over the falls; while at dawn was added the screaming of white-breasted fowl jostling one another in their flight as they still thronged up towards the north.

We almost always think of Canada as a cold country. Its summer counts for little; nor meadow-grass waist deep, over which swarms of mosquitoes hover, tormenting man and horse; nor sunshine that blisters the face, nor natural strawberry-grounds as wide as Yorkshire, nor a sky clearer, purer, and more intensely blue than any that spans Italian plains. No; Canada means winter, snow, quivering northern lights, log-fires, and sledge-bells!

Brandon found Canada hot, but when he had finished his work there, he left it, and betook him-

self to the south, while it became the Canada of our thought.

He went through the very heart of the States, and pleased himself with wild rough living in lands where the rich earth is always moist and warm, and primeval forest still shelters large tracts of it.

Camping out at night, sometimes in swampy hollows, it was strange to wake when there was neither moon nor star, and see the great decaying trees that storm had felled or age had ruined, glow with a weird phosphorescent light, which followed the rents in them, and hovered about the seams in their bark, making them look like the ghosts of huge alligators prone in the places they had ravaged, and giving forth infernal gleams. Stranger yet it was to see in the dark, moving near the pine-wood fire, two feeble wandering lights, the eyes of some curious deer that had come to gaze and wonder, and show its whereabouts by those soft reflections.

And then, when he and his companions wanted venison, it was strange to go forth into the forest in the dark, two of them bearing a great iron pot slung upon a long rod, and heaped with blazing pine-cones. Then several pairs of these luminous spots would

be seen coming together, and perhaps a dangerous couple would glare down from a tree, and a wounded panther would come crashing into their midst.

After that, he went and spent Christmas in Florida. He had had frequent letters from home and from his step-father. He wished to keep away till a certain thing was settled one way or the other, but every letter showed that it was still unsettled; the sea-nymph that he had been wasting his heart upon had not yet decided to accept his brother's, but there was every likelihood that she would.

As time went on, however, he felt happy in the consciousness that absence was doing its work upon him, and that change had refreshed his mind. He was beginning to forget her. When the woman whom one loves is to marry one's brother, and that brother happens to be of all the family the one whom one prefers, what quality can be so admirable as inconstancy?

Still, for a man who was really forgetting, he argued the matter too much in his mind. Even when he got far south, among the Florida keys, and saw the legions of the heron and the ibis stalking with stately gait along the wet sand, and every now and then

thrusting in their "javelin bills," spiking and bringing out long wriggling flashes of silver that went alive down their throats, he would still be thinking it over. Yes; he was forgetting her. He began to be in better spirits. He was in very good spirits one day in January when, quite unknown to him, the snow was shovelled away from the corner of a quiet churchyard in which his mother slept, and room was made beside her for the old man who had loved him as his own.

Old Daniel Mortimer had no such *following* as had attended the funeral of his mother, and no such peaceful sunshine sleeping on a landscape all blossom and growth. The wind raged, and the snow whirled all about his grave and in it. The coffin was white before the first clod of earth was thrown on it, and the mourners were driven out of the churchyard, when the solemn service was over, by such gusts of storm and whirling wind as they could hardly stand against.

His will was read. He had hardly anything to leave. His directions were very simple and few, and there was a little desk locked up in a cabinet that nobody thought about, and that the one person who could have opened it supposed to concern exclu-

sively himself. So when he came, six months after, and looked about him with regretful affection; when he had put the old man's portrait up in a place of honour, and looked to the paying of all the debts, for everything, even to the furniture, was now his own; when he had read the will, and sealed up all such papers as he thought his half-brother Valentine might afterwards want to refer to—he betook himself to his own particular domain, his long room in the top of the house. There, locking himself in, he opened his cabinet, and taking out the little desk, sat down to look for and read this letter.

The desk was soon opened. He lifted one half, saw several old miniatures which had belonged to his own father's family, a lock of his father's hair which he remembered to have seen in his mother's possession, and one or two trinkets. No letter.

It was not without some slight trepidation that he opened the other side, and there, nothing else being with it, a large letter sealed with black and directed to himself in his step-father's well-known hand, it was lying.

As he took the letter up, a sensation so faint, so ethereal that it is hard to describe or characterize it,

but which most of us have felt at least once, came over him, or rather came about him, as if something from without suggested a presence.

He was free from any sensation of fear, but he chose to speak; lifting up his face as if the old man had been standing before him, he said aloud, "Yes, I promised." The feeling was gone as he spoke, and he broke the seal.

A long letter. His eyes, as it was folded, fell first on these surprising words, "I forbade my mother to leave her property to me," and then, "I have never judged her," the aged writer continued, "for in her case I know not what I could have done."

Brandon laid the letter down, and took a moment for thought, before he could make up his mind to read it through. Some crime, some deep disgrace, he perceived was about to be confided to him. With a hurried sense of dislike and shrinking from acquaintance with it, he wondered whether his own late mother had known anything of it, then whether he was there called upon to divulge it now, and to act. If not, he argued with himself, why was it to be confided to him?

Then he addressed himself to his task, and read the

letter through, coming to its last word only to be still more surprised, as he perceived plainly that beyond what he could gather from those two short sentences already quoted, nothing was confided or confessed, nothing at all—only a request was made to him, and that very urgently and solemnly, but it concerned not himself, but his young brother Valentine, for not content with repudiating the family property for himself, the old father was desirous, it was evident, through his step-son, to stand in the way and bar his own son's very remote chance of inheriting it either.

A thing that is very unexpected and moderately strange, we meet with wide-opened eyes, with a start and perhaps exclamations; but a thing more than strange, utterly unaccounted for, quite unreasonable, and the last thing one could have supposed possible as coming from the person who demanded it, is met in far quieter fashion.

Brandon leaned back in his chair and slowly looked about him. He was conscious that he was drawing deeper breath than usual, and that his heart beat quickly, but he was so much surprised that for the moment his thoughts appeared to scatter themselves about, and he knew not how to marshal them

and make them help him as to what this might mean.

Mystery in romance and in tales is such a common vulgar thing, in tragedy and even in comedy it is so completely what we demand and expect, that we seldom consider what an astonishing and very uncommon thing it is when it appears in life. And here in a commonplace, well-conducted, happy, and united family was a mystery pointing to something that one of its best-loved members had never had a hint of. Whatever it was, it concerned a placé little more than fifty miles off, and a man in whose presence he had lived from his early childhood; the utmost caution of secrecy was demanded, and the matter spoken of entirely changed the notions he had always held concerning his step-father, whom he had thought he knew better than any man living. When one had believed that one absolutely understood another, how it startles the mind to discover that this is a mistake! A beautiful old man this had been—pious, not very worldly-wise, but having a sweetness of nature, a sunny smile, and a native ease about him that would not have been possible without a quiet conscience. This he had possessed, but "I forbade my mother to leave

her property to me." His step-son turned back the page, and looked at those words again. Then his eyes fell lower. "In her case I know not what I could have done." "When did he forbid this—was it ten years ago, twenty years, fifty years? He was really very well off when he married my mother. Now where did he get the property that he lost by his speculations? Not by the law; his profession never brought him in more than two hundred a year. Oh! he had it from the old cousin that he and Grand often talk of, old John Mortimer. And that's where the old silver plate came from. Of course, and where John got his name.

"We always knew, I think, that there was an aged mother; now why did I take for granted that she must be in her second childhood? I wonder whether John put that into my head. I think I did remark to him once when I was a boy and he was living at home, that it was odd there was no portrait of her in either of the houses. (But no more there is of Grand now I come to think of it; John never could make him sit.) Before the dear old man got so infirm he used generally to go out about once a year and come back in low spirits, not liking to be questioned. He

may have gone then to see his mother, but I know sister used to think he went to see the relations of that wretched woman, his first wife. Who shall say now?"

And then he sat down and thought and thought, but nothing came of his thinking. Peter Melcombe, so far as he knew, was perfectly well; that was a comfort. Valentine was very docile; that was also a comfort; and considering that what his father had wished for him nearly four years ago was actually coming to pass, and everything was in train for his going to one of the very best and healthiest of our colonies, there seemed little danger that even if Melcombe fell to him he should find the putting it from him a great act of self-denial.

And what a strange thing it was, Brandon thought, that through the force of circumstances he himself should have been made to bring about such an unlikely thing! That so young a man should want to marry was strange enough. It was more strange that he should have fixed on the only woman in the world that his brother wanted. This said brother had thought it the very climax of all that was strange that it should have devolved on him who had com-

mand of money and who knew the colonies, to make this early marriage possible. But surely the climax of strangeness was rather here, that he had all this time been working as if on purpose to bring about the longing desire of his old step-father, which till then he had never heard of, depriving Valentine as much as was possible of his freedom, shutting him up to the course his father wanted him to follow, and preparing to send him as far as in this world he could be sent from the dreaded precincts of Melcombe.

Brandon had devoted out of his moderate patrimony a thousand pounds each to his step-brother and his step-sisters. In the case of Valentine he had done more; he had in a recent visit to New Zealand bought some land with a dwelling-house on it, and to this place it was arranged that immediately on his marriage Valentine should sail.

Brandon felt a strong desire to go and look at Melcombe, for his step-father's conduct with regard to it kept coming back to his mind with ever-fresh surprise; but though he searched his memory it could yield him nothing, not a hint, not a look, from any one which threw the least light on this letter.

"But that there's crime at the core of it, or some deep disgrace," he soliloquized, "appears to me most evident, and I take his assurance in its fullest meaning that he had nothing to do with it."

The next morning, having slept over the contents of the letter, he went to his upper room, locked himself in, and read it again. Then after pausing a while to reconsider it, he went up to the wall to look at a likeness of Dorothea Graham. Valentine had a photographing machine, and had filled the house with portraits of himself and his beloved. This was supposed to be one of the best. "Lucky enough that I had the sense to leave this behind me," thought Brandon. "Yes, you sweet thing, I am by no means breaking my heart now about you and your love for that boy. You are sure to marry him; you have a faithful heart, so the best thing for him will be to let you marry as soon as possible. I'll tell him so as we walk to John Mortimer's to-day. I'll tell him he may do it as soon as he likes."

Accordingly as about six o'clock he and Valentine walked through a wood, across a common, and then over some fields, Brandon began to make some remarks concerning the frequent letters that passed

between these youthful lovers. "It is not to be supposed," he observed, "that any lady would correspond with you thus for years if she had not fully made up her mind to accept you in the end."

"No," answered Valentine with perfect confidence; "but she knows that I promised my father to wait a few months more before I decidedly engaged myself, but for that promise I was to have had an answer from her half a year ago."

Brandon fully believed that Dorothea Graham loved his brother, and that her happiness was in his own hands. He had found it easy to put the possibility of an early marriage in Valentine's way, but nothing could well go forward without his sanction, and since his return he had hitherto felt that the words which would give it were too difficult for him to say. Now, however, that remarkable letter, cutting in across the usual current of his thoughts, had thrown them back for awhile. So that Dorothea seemed less real, less dear, less present to him.

The difficult words were about to be said.

"If she knows why you do not speak, and waits, there certainly is an understanding between you, which amounts almost to the same thing."

"Yes," said Valentine, "and in August, *as she knows*, I shall ask her again."

"Then," said Brandon, almost taking Valentine's breath away with sudden delight, "I think, old fellow, that when she has once said 'yes,' you had better make short work with the engagement; you will never be more ready to marry than you are now; you are a few months older than John was when he went and did it; and here you are, with your house in New Zealand ready built, your garden planted, a flock of sheep bought, and all there is to do is to turn out the people now taking care of the place, as soon as you are ready to come in."

Brandon was standing on a little plank which bridged a stream about two feet wide; he had turned to say this, for Valentine was behind him.

Valentine received the communication first with silence, then with a shout of triumph, after which he ran completely round his brother several times, jumping over the stream and flourishing a great stick that he held, with boyish ecstasy, not at all dignified, but very sincere. When he had made at least three complete circles, and jumped the stream six times,

Giles gravely walked on, and Valentine presently followed, wiping his forehead.

"Nobody could have expressed my own sentiments in more charming English," he exclaimed; "I never heard such grammar in my life; what a brick you are, St. George!"

Giles had great faith in his theory that absence always cured love, also in his belief that his was cured and half forgotten. At that moment he experienced a sharp pang, however, that was not very like forgetfulness, but which Valentine converted almost into self-scorn when he said—

"You know, Giles, she always did show the most undisguised liking for me from our first meeting; and then look how constant she has been, and what beautiful letters she writes, always trying, too, to improve me. Of course I cannot even pretend to think she would not have engaged herself to me months ago if I might have asked her."

"All true, perfectly true," he thought to himself; "he loves her and she loves him, and I believe if she had never met with Valentine, she would still never have married me. What a fool I am!"

"Why wouldn't you take this view of things

yesterday, when I tried to make you?" asked Valentine.

"I was not ready for it," answered Giles, "or it was not ready for me."

Thereupon they passed through a wicket-gate, into a kind of glen or wilderness, at the end of John Mortimer's garden, and beyond the stream where his little girls acted Nausicaa and his little boys had preserves of minute fishes, ingeniously fenced in with sticks and fine netting.

"There's Grand," exclaimed Valentine, "they've brought him out to look at their water-snails. What a venerable old boy he is! he looks quite holy, doesn't he?"

"Hold your tongue," said Brandon, "they'll hear you. He's come to see their newts; they had a lot yesterday at the bottom of the punt. Little Hugh had one in his hand, a beast with an orange breast, and it was squinting up at him."

It would be hard to say of any man that he is *never* right. If he is always thinking that he has forgotten a certain lady, surely he is right sometimes.

They went in to dinner, a party of four, for John Mortimer since his wife's death did not entertain ladies,

and Miss Christie Grant always presided at an early dinner, when the governess and the children dined.

As the dinner advanced St. George and Valentine both got into high spirits, the former because a stronger conviction than usual assured him that he was forgetting Dorothea Graham; the latter, because instead of being pulled back, he had at last got a shove in the other direction. In short, Valentine was so happy in his jokes and so full of fun, that the servants had no sooner withdrawn than John Mortimer taxed him with having good reason for being so, mentioned the probable cause, and asked to see Miss Graham's portrait, "which, no doubt," he said, "you have got in your pocket."

"Why I have had that for years," said Valentine scornfully.

"And dozens of them," said Brandon; "they took them themselves."

"When is it to be?" asked old Grand with great interest.

"I don't exactly know, uncle; *even Giles* doesn't know that! If he had known, I'm sure he would have told you, and asked your advice, for I always brought him up to be very respectful to his elders."

"Come, sir, come," said the old man laughing, "if you don't *exactly* know, I suppose you have a tolerably distinct notion."

"I know when I should like it to be, and when I think D. would like it. Not too late for a wedding tour, say October, now, or," seeing his brother look grave, "or November; suppose we say November."

"I'm afraid there is no wedding tour in the programme," observed Brandon. "The voyage must be the tour."

"Then I'll go without my cart. We must have a tour; it will be the only fun I shall ever be able to give her."

Valentine had inherited only about two hundred pounds from his father, he having been left residuary legatee, and he was much more inclined to spend this on luxuries than on necessaries.

"You've bought me land, and actually paid for it yourself, and you've bought me a flock, and made me a barn, and yet you deny me the very necessaries of life, though I can pay for them myself! I must have a tour, and D. must have a basket-carriage."

"Well, my dear fellow," said Grand, "though that matter is not yet settled, it is evident things are so

far advanced that we may begin to think of the wedding presents. Now, what would you like to have from me, I wonder? I mean how would you prefer to have it? John and I have already considered the amount, and he quite agrees with me as to what I ought to give to my only brother's only son."

"*Only brother's!*" The word struck Brandon both as showing that the old man had almost forgotten other dead brothers, and also as evidently being the preface to a larger gift than he had anticipated.

"Thank you, uncle," said Valentine, almost accomplishing a blush of pride and pleasure. "As you are so kind as to let me choose, I should like your present in money, in my pocket, you know, because there is the tour, and it would go towards that."

"In your pocket!" exclaimed John Mortimer, with a laugh of such amusement and raillery as almost put Valentine out of countenance. "Why, do you think my father wants to give you a school-boy's tip?"

"I think a good deal depends on the lady," said Grand, who also seemed amused; "if she has no fortune, it might be wise to settle it on her; if she has, you might wish to lay it out in more land, or to

invest it here; you and Giles must consider this. I mean to give you two thousand pounds." Then, when he saw that Valentine was silent from astonishment, he went on, "And if your dear father had been here he would not have been at all surprised. Many circumstances, with which you are not acquainted, assure me of this, and I consider that I owe everything to him." There was a certain sternness about these words; he would have, it was evident, no discussion.

John Mortimer heard his father say this with surprise. "He must mean that he owes his religious views to my uncle," was his thought; but to Brandon, who did not trouble himself about those last words, the others were full of meaning; the amount of the gift, together with the hint at circumstances with which Valentine was not acquainted, made him feel almost certain that the strange words, "I forbade my mother to leave her property to me," alluded to something which was known to the next brother.

Valentine, at first, was too much surprised to be joyous, but he thanked his uncle with something of the cordial ingenuousness and grace which had distinguished his father.

"I can have a tour *now*, can't I, old fellow," he said after a time to his brother; "take my wife"—here a joyous laugh—"my WIFE on the Continent; we shall go dashing about from place to place, you know, staying at hotels, *and all that!*"

"To be sure," said Brandon, "staying at hotels, of course, and ordering wonderful things for breakfast. I think I see you now—

> 'Happy married lovers,
> Phillis trifling with a plover's
> Egg, while Corydon uncovers
> With a grace the Sally Lun.'"

"That's the way this fellow is always making game of me," exclaimed Valentine; "why I'm older than you were, John, when you married."

"And wild horses shall never drag the words out of me that I was too young," said John Mortimer, "whatever I may think," he continued.

"John was a great deal graver than you are," said Brandon; "besides, he knew the multiplication table."

"So do I, of course," exclaimed Valentine.

"Well," answered Brandon, "I never said you did not."

## CHAPTER X.

### CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES.

"Now I am at a loss to know whether it be my hare's foot that is my preservation; for I never had a fit of the collique since I wore it; or whether it be my taking of a pill of turpentine every morning."

*Diary of Mr. Samuel Pepys.*

"JOHN, the Melcombes have stayed on the Continent so much longer than I expected that I hardly remember whether I told you I had invited them to come round this way, and remain here a few days on their return." Old Augustus Mortimer said this to his son, who was dining with him a few days after the conversation concerning the wedding present. "I supposed," he added, "that you would not invite that child or his mother again?"

John Mortimer replied, in clear and vigorous English, that he never should—never!

The manner in which he was looked after by the ladies had become quite a joke in the family, though one of his chief tormentors had lately been moved out of his way—Louisa Grant was married. Captain

Walker had at first, after Mr. Mortimer's death, agreed to wait for her till Brandon's return; but his regiment being ordered abroad, he had induced her to hasten the wedding, which took place about three months before Brandon reached England. And as Louisa did not, out of respect to her step-father, like to be married from his house so soon after his death, old Grand had received and entertained all the wedding guests, and John Mortimer had given away the bride.

On that occasion it was confidently asserted by the remaining Miss Grant and Valentine, that there were four ladies present who would at any time with pleasure undertake to act the loving mother to dear John's seven children.

John was becoming rather sensitive; he remembered how sweetly Mrs. Melcombe had smiled on him, and he remembered the ghost story too.

"I rather want to see how that boy is getting on," continued Augustus.

"By-the-bye," said the son, "I heard to my surprise the other day from Swan, whose son, it seems, was doing some work at Melcombe this spring (making a greenhouse, I think), that Mrs. Melcombe wintered at Mentone, partly on her boy's account, for

he had a feverish or aguish illness at Venice, and she was advised not to bring him to England."

"I never heard of it," said Grand, with anxiety.

"Nor I, my dear father; but I meant to have told you before; for I see you take an interest in the child."

"What imprudence!" continued Grand; "those people really have no sense. I begged them particularly not to go to Venice in the autumn."

"Yes," said John, "it was foolish; but Swan went on to say that he heard the boy was all right again."

"I hope so," replied Grand, almost fervently; "and his mother wants to consult us now about his going to school."

John could not forbear to smile when his father said "us."

"So you have written to say you shall be glad to see them?" he inquired.

"Yes; it is very little I ever see of my relations."

John thought that perhaps his father's mind was turning with affection towards his family, from whom he did not now doubt that he had been estranged owing to some cause which had terminated with the old mother's death. So he said cordially—

"Would you like, when Mrs. Melcombe goes home, to invite Laura to remain with you for a few weeks? I have no doubt, if you would, that Lizzy Grant would be charmed to come at the same time, and taste the sweetness of freedom. The two girls could have the carriage, you know, and the canoes, and the riding-horses. They might enjoy themselves very much, and give croquet parties and picnics to their hearts' content. I would get old Christie to come to you whenever a chaperone was wanted. She is a most valuable possession, my dear father, but I would lend her."

"You are very kind, my dear," answered the father, who often addressed his son in this fashion when they were alone. "I think it would be a pleasure to me to have the girls. You can't think, John, how cheerful the house used to be before your sisters were married; you can hardly remember it, you were so young."

"Why did I never think of proposing such a visit to him before?" thought John, almost with compunction.

"I seem to know them pretty well," he answered, "from their letters and from hearing you talk of them;

but what I really remember, I believe, is four grand young ladies who used to carry me a pick-a-back, and give me sugared almonds."

Of the four Miss Mortimers, the eldest had married a clergyman, and died soon after; the second and third had married "shepherd kings," and were living with the said kings in Australia; and the fourth was in India with her husband and a grown-up family. Their father had given to each of them an ample fortune, and parted with her before his only son was five years old, for John Mortimer was fifteen years younger than his youngest sister, and had been, though the daughters were much beloved, a greater joy and comfort to his father than all four of them put together.

He was glad that his father showed this willingness to have Lizzy Grant to stay in his house, for he was fond of all the Grants; there was a kind of plain-spoken intimacy between him and them that he enjoyed. The two elder had always been his very good friends, and during his wife's lifetime had generally called him "John dear," and looked to him and his wife to take them about whenever their brother was away. Liz, who was rather a plain girl, he

regarded more in the light of a niece than of a step-cousin.

A day or two after this, therefore, while sitting alone writing his letters (Grand being gone out for his constitutional), when he was told that Miss Grant wanted to speak to him, he desired that she might be shown in.

She was sitting at the back door in a little pony carriage, and giving the reins to her boy, she passed through it, to the wonder of all beholders.

Very few young ladies were shown in there.

"What is it?" exclaimed John, for Liz looked almost sulky.

"Oh John," she answered, with a sort of whimsical pathos, "isn't it sad, so few delightful things as there are, that two of them should come together, so that I can't have both!"

"What are the delightful things—offers?"

"Don't be so tiresome. No, of course not. You know very well that nothing of that kind ever happens to me."

"Indeed, if that is the case, it can only be because your frocks are almost always crumpled, and—what's that long bit of blue ribbon that I see?"

"It's all right—that's how it's meant to go. I can't think why you fancy that I'm not tidy. St. George is always saying so too."

"That's very hard. Well, child?"

"I thought perhaps you knew that Grand had invited me to stay six weeks at his house—Laura Melcombe to be there also, and we two to do just as we liked. The whole of August, John, and part of September, and that's the very time when I can't come, because we are going to be at the seaside. Dorothea is to join us, you know, and if I do not see her then I never shall, for they are to sail at Christmas."

"There is a world of misery to be got out of conflicting pleasures," said John philosophically. "You can't come, that's evident; and I had just given orders that the new canoe should be painted and the old one caulked. Two quiet ponies for you to drive (you are a very tolerable whip, I know). As to the grapes, a house is being kept back on purpose to be ripe just at that time; and the croquet balls are all sent to be painted. Melancholy facts! but such is life."

"No but, John——"

"I'm extremely busy to-day."

"Not so busy that you have not time to laugh at me. This would have been almost the greatest pleasure I ever had."

"And I've been reminding my father," proceeded John, "that when Emily came to stay with him she always sat at the head of the table. She asked him if she might, and so should you have done, because, though Laura is a relation, he has known you all your life."

"No but, John," repeated Lizzie, "can't you do something for me? Tell me whether Laura Melcombe has been already invited?"

"She has not, Miss Grant."

"I have no doubt, if you asked Grand to let the visit be put off till the middle of September, he would."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Then you'll do it, won't you? because you know you and I have always been such friends."

"Now you mention it, I think we have; at any rate, I don't dislike you half so much as I do some of my other friends. Yes, child, your confidence is not misplaced."

"Then I may leave the matter in your hands?" exclaimed Liz joyfully.

"You really may," replied John Mortimer, and he took her back to the pony carriage in a high state of bliss and gratitude.

This change, however, which was easily effected, made a difference to several people whom Miss Grant had no wish to disoblige. First, Mrs. Melcombe, finding that Laura was invited to pay a long visit, and that the invitation was not extended to her, resolved not to come home by Wigfield at all; but when Laura wrote an acceptation, excused herself from coming also, on the ground of her desire to get home.

Grand, therefore, did not see Peter, and this troubled him more than he liked to avow. Brandon was also disappointed, for he particularly wanted to see the boy and his mother again. The strangeness of his step-father's letter grew upon him, and it rather fretted him to think that he could not find any plausible reason for going over to Melcombe to look about him. He was therefore secretly vexed with his sister when he found that, in consequence of her request to John, the plans of all the Melcombes had been changed. So Liz with a cheerful heart went to the

sea-side with Mrs. Henfrey and Valentine, and very soon wrote home to Miss Christie Grant that Dorothea had joined them, that the long-talked-of offer had been made and (of course) accepted, and that Giles was come. She did not add that Giles had utterly lost his heart again to his brother's bride elect, but that she would not have done if she had known it.

Miss Christie was wroth on the occasion.

"It's just shameful," she remarked. "Everybody knew Miss Graham would accept him, but why can't she say how it was and when it was? She's worse than her mother. 'Dear Aunt,' her mother wrote to me, 'I'm going to marry Mr. Mortimer on Saturday week, and I hope you'll come to the wedding, but you're not to wear your blue gown. Your affectionate niece, EMILY GRANT.' That was every word she said, and I'd never heard there was anything between her and Mr. Mortimer before."

"And why were you not to wear your blue gown?" inquired John Mortimer.

"Well," replied Miss Christie, "I don't deny that if she hadn't been beforehand with me I might just slyly have said that my blue gown would do, for I'd

*only* had it five years. I was aye thrifty; she knew it was as good as ever—a very excellent lutestring, and made for her wedding when she married Mr. Grant—so she was determined to take my joke against her out of my mouth."

If Miss Christie had not found plenty to do during the next six weeks, she would have grumbled yet more than she did over her wrongs. As it was, Master Augustus John Mortimer came home from school for his long holidays, and he and his friends excited more noise, bustle, and commotion in the house than all the other children put together.

John Mortimer's eldest son, always called Johnnie, to distinguish him from his father, was ridiculously big for his age, portentously clever and keen-witted, awkward, blunt, rude, full of fun, extremely fond of his father, and exceedingly unlike him in person. His hair was nearly black, his forehead was square and high, his hands and feet almost rivalled those of his parent in size, and his height was five feet three.

In any other eyes than those of a fond parent he must have appeared as an awkward, noisy, plain, and intolerably active boy; but his father (who almost from his infancy had pleased himself with a mental

picture of the manner of man he would probably grow into) saw nothing of all this, but merely added in his mind two inches to the height of the future companion he was to find in him, and wished that the boy could get over a lisp which still disfigured some of his words.

He brought such a surprising account of his merits with him—how he could learn anything he pleased, how he never forgot anything, how, in fact, his master, as regarded his lessons, had not a fault to find with him, that when his twin sisters had seen it, there seemed to them something strange in his being as fond of tarts and lollipops as ever.

As for John, nothing surprised him. Miss Christie saw great diversities in his children, but in regard to them all he showed an aggravating degree of contentment with what Providence had sent him. Miss Christie wore through Johnnie's sojourn at home as well as she could, and was very happy when she saw him off to school again; happier still when walking towards home across the fields with John Mortimer and the four younger children, they saw Brandon and Valentine at a distance coming to meet them.

"So they are at home again," she exclaimed; "and

now we'll hear all about the wedding that is to be. I've been just wearying for the *parteeculars*, and there never were such bad letter-writers as those girls. Anyhow there'll be a handsome bridegroom."

"Ah!" said John Mortimer, "all the ladies admire Val. He's quite a woman's man."

"Well, and St. George is a man's man, then," retorted Miss Christie; "ye all admire him, I am sure."

"And what are you, papa, dearest?" asked Janie, who had hold of his hand.

"I'm my own man, my little queen-regnant," answered her father with a somewhat exultant laugh.

"Ay, Mr. Mortimer, I'm just surprised at ye," quoth Miss Christie, shaking her head over these vainglorious words.

"I think father's the most beautifullest man of all," said little Janie, with a sort of jealous feeling as if somehow he had been disparaged, though she did not exactly know how. "And the goodest, too," she presently added, as if not satisfied with her first tribute to him.

Valentine, who was seldom out of countenance on any occasion, received the congratulations of all

the party with a certain rather becoming pride and complacency. He seemed, however, to be taking things very easily, but he presently became rather silent, and John, who felt keenly that Brandon was not so indifferent to the bride-elect as he wished to be, turned the conversation as soon as he could to other matters. There was some talk about Valentine's land which had been bought for him in New Zealand, after which Brandon said suddenly,—

"John, when this fellow is gone, or perhaps before, I mean to have something to do—some regular work—and I think of taking to literature in good earnest."

"All right," answered John, "and as you evidently intend me to question you, I will ask first whether you, Giles Brandon, mean to write on some subject that you understand, or on one that you know nothing about?"

Brandon laughed. "There is more to be said in favour of that last than you think," he answered.

"It may be that there is everything to be said; but if you practise it, don't put your name to your work, that's all."

"I shall not do so in any case. How do I know whether the only use people may make of it (and

that a metaphorical one) may not be to throw it at me ever after."

"I don't like that," said Miss Christie. "I could wish that every man should own his own."

"No," remarked John Mortimer; "if a man in youth writes a foolish book and gives his name to it, he has, so far as his name is concerned, used his one chance; and if, in maturer life, he writes something high and good, then if he wants his wise child to live, he must consent to die himself with the foolish one. It is much the same with one who has become notorious through the doing of some base or foolish action. If he repent, rise to better things, and write a noble book, he must not claim it as if it could elevate him. It must go forth on its own merits, or it will not be recognised for what it is, only for what he is or was. No, if a man wants to bring in new thoughts or work elevating changes, he must not clog them with a name that has been despised."

"I think Dorothea and I may as well write a book together," said Valentine. "She did begin one, but somehow it stuck fast."

"You had better write it about yourselves, then," said John, "that being nearly all you study just now,

I should think. Many a novel contains the author and little else. He explains himself in trying to describe human nature."

"Human nature!" exclaimed Valentine; "we must have something grander than that to write of, I can tell you. We have read so many books that turn it 'the seamy side outward,' and point out the joins as if it was a glove, that we cannot condescend to it."

"No," said John, setting off on the subject again as if he was most seriously considering it, Valentine meanwhile smiling significantly on the others. "It is a mistake to describe too much from within. The external life as we see it should rather be given, and about as much of the motives and springs of action as an intelligent man with good opportunity could discover. We don't want to be told all. We do not know all about those we live with, and always have lived with. If ever I took to writing fiction I should not pretend to know all about my characters. The author's world appears small if he makes it manifest that he reigns there. I don't understand myself thoroughly. How can I understand so many other people? I cannot fathom them. My own children often surprise me. If I believed thoroughly in the

children of my pen, they would write themselves down sometimes in a fashion that I had not intended."

"John talks like a book," observed Valentine. "You propose a subject, and he lays forth his views as if he had considered it for a week. 'Drive on, Samivel.'"

"But I don't agree with him," said Miss Christie. "When I read a book I aye dislike to be left in any doubt what the man means or what the story means."

"I always think it a great proof of power in a writer," said Brandon, "when he consciously or unconsciously makes his reader feel that he knows a vast deal more about his characters than he has chosen to tell. And what a keen sense some have of the reality of their invented men and women! So much so that you may occasionally see evident tokens that they are jealous of them. They cannot bear to put all the witty and clever speeches into the mouths of these 'fetches' of their own imagination. Some must be saved up to edge in as a sly aside a sage reflection of the author's own. There never should be any author's asides."

"I don't know about that," John answered, "but I

often feel offended with authors who lack imagination to see that a group of their own creations would not look in one another's eyes just what they look in his own. The author's pretty woman is too often pretty to all; his wit is acknowledged as a wit by all. The difference of opinion comes from the readers. They differ certainly."

"Even I," observed Valentine, "if I were an author's wit, might be voted a bore, and how sad that would be, for in real life it is only right to testify that I find little or no difference of opinion."

He spoke in a melancholy tone, and heaved up a sigh.

"Is cousin Val a wit?" asked little Hugh.

"I am afraid I am," said Valentine; "they're always saying so, and it's very unkind of them to talk about it, because I couldn't help it, could I?"

Here the little Anastasia, touched with pity by the heartfelt pathos of his tone, put her dimpled hand in his and said tenderly, "Never mind, dear, it'll be better soon, p'raps, and you didn't do it on purpose."

"Does it hurt?" asked Hugh, also full of ruth.

"Be ashamed of yourself," whispered Miss Christie,

"to work on the dear children's feelings so. No, my sweet mannie, it doesn't hurt a bit."

"I'm very much to be pitied," proceeded Valentine. "That isn't all"—he sighed again—"I was born with a bad French accent, and without a single tooth in my head, or out of it, while such was my weakness, that it took two strong men, both masters of arts, to drag me through the rudiments of the Latin grammar."

Anastasia's eyes filled with tears. It seemed so sad; and the tender little heart had not gone yet into the question of *seeming*.

"They *teached* you the Latin grammar did they?" said Bertram, who had also been listening, and was relieved to hear of something in this list of miseries that he could understand; "that's what Miss Crampton teaches me. I don't like it, and you didn't either, then. I'm six and three quarters; how old were you?"

Before Valentine had answered, John and Brandon, finding themselves before the party, had stopped and turned. Brandon was surprised to see how earnestly the two elder children, while he talked, had been looking at him, and then at their father and Valen-

tine. At last, when this pause occurred, and the two groups met, Janie said—

"I am sure papa is a great deal prettier than Mr. Brandon, and Cousin Val looks quite ugly beside him."

"Yes, Janie," said Bertram, with an air of high satisfaction, "papa's much more beautiful than either of the others. I shall ask Miss Crampton when I go in if she doesn't think so. You would like to know what she thinks, wouldn't you, father?"

John had opened his mouth to say no, when his better sense coming to his aid, he forbore to speak. For this lady taught his children to perfection, but his friends always would insist that she wanted to teach him too—something that he wouldn't learn.

Aunt Christie, his constant friend and champion, presently spoke for him.

"No, children," she said, as soon as she had composed her voice to a due gravity, "it's natural ye should admire your father, good children generally do, but, now, if I were you, I would never tell anybody at all, not even Miss Crampton—do ye hear me, all of you? I would never tell anybody your opinion of him. If ye do, they will certainly think ye highly

conceited, for ye know quite well that people say you four little ones are just as exactly like him as ye can be."

The children were evidently impressed.

"In fact," said Valentine, "now I take a good look at him, I should say that you are even more like him than he is himself—but—I may be mistaken."

"I won't say it then," said Bertram, now quite convinced.

"And I won't, and I won't," added others, as they ran forward to open a gate.

"Cheer up, John," said St. George, "let us not see so much beauty and virtue cast down. There's Miss Crampton looking out of the school-room window."

But though he laughed he did not deceive John Mortimer, who knew as well as possible that the loss of Dorothea Graham pressed heavily on his heart.

"You two are going to dine with me, of course," he said, when all the party had passed into the wilderness beyond his garden.

"On the contrary, with your leave," answered Valentine, "we are going to take a lesson of Swan

in the art of budding roses. We cannot manage it to our minds. We dined early."

"And I suppose you will agree with Val," observed Brandon, "that a rose-garden is one of the necessaries of life."

"Dorothea must have one, must she, out in New Zealand? Well, Swan will be proud to teach you anything he knows or doesn't know, and he will give you an opinion if you ask it on any subject whatever."

Accordingly John went into the house to dine, and perhaps it was in consequence of this assertion that the two young men asked their old friend's opinion on various points not at all in his line. Valentine even told him that his brother intended to write a book, and asked him what he thought it had better be about; whereupon Swan, while deftly shaping his *bud*, shook his head gravely, and said that wanted a deal of thinking over.

"But if I was you, sir," he continued, speaking to Brandon, "I should get Mr. Mortimer—Mr. John—to help you, specially if there's going to be any foreign talk in it. My word, I don't believe there's any language going that Mr. Mortimer can't lay his tongue to!"

## CHAPTER XI.

### WANTED A DESERT ISLAND.

"We, too, have autumns, when our leaves
Drop loosely through the dampened air;
When all our good seems bound in sheaves,
And we stand reaped and bare."

LOWELL.

LAURA and Mrs. Melcombe went home, and Laura saw the window again that Joseph had so skilfully glazed. Joseph was not there, and Laura would not have occupied herself with constant thoughts about him if there had been anything, or rather anybody else to think of. She soon began to feel low-spirited and restless, while, like a potato-plant in a dark cellar, she put forth long runners towards the light, and no light was to be found. This homely simile ought to be forgiven, because it is such a good one

Peter was getting too old for her teaching. He had a tutor, but the tutor was a married man, and had taken lodgings for himself and his wife in one of the farm-houses.

Laura had no career before her, and no worthy occupation. All that came to pass in her day was a short saunter, or a drive, or a visit to the market-town, where she sat looking on while her sister-in-law did some shopping.

Melcombe was six or seven miles from any *visitable* families, excepting two or three clergymen and their wives; it was shut up in a three-cornered nook of land, and could not be approached excepting through turn-pikes, and up and down some specially steep hills. These things make havoc with country sociability.

As long as there had been plenty to do and see, Laura had enjoyed her life on the Continent, and had fed herself with hope. So many people as passed before her, it would be strange, she thought, if not one of them had been made for her, not one was to give her the love she wanted, the devotion she knew she could return.

It was certainly strange, and yet it came to pass, though the travelled fool returned, improved in style, dress, and even in appearance, while her conversation was naturally more amusing than before, for she had seen most places and things that people like to talk of.

Not one man had asked her to spend her life with him, and she came back more given to flights of fancy than ever, but far better acquainted with herself and more humble, for she had spent so much of her time (in imagination) with Joseph that she had become accustomed to his slightly provincial accent, and had ceased to care about it. Joseph, however, did not speak like his good father, and he had been endowed with as much learning as he would consent to acquire, Swan having felt a great ambition to make him a certified schoolmaster, but Joseph having been at an early age rather an idle young dog, had tormented his father into letting him take to a mere handicraft, and had left school writing a hand almost like copperplate, and being a very fair accountant, but without thirst for knowledge, and without any worthy ambition.

Laura had always known that nothing but a desert island was wanted, and she could be his contented wife; but a desert island was not to be had, such things are getting rare in the world, and she now thought that any remote locality, where nobody knew her, would do.

But where was Joseph?

She had certainly gone away without giving him any interview, she had persistently kept away, yet though she was doing what she could, by fits and starts, to forget him, that perverse imagination of hers always pictured *him* as waiting, constant, ready. There was a particular tree in the glen behind which she had so frequently represented him to herself as standing patiently while she approached with furtive steps, that when she came home and went to look at it, there was a feeling almost akin to surprise in her mind at seeing the place drenched in sparkling dew, and all overgrown with moss. Footsteps that are feigned never tread anything down; they leave no print, excepting in the heart that feigns them.

When Laura saw this place in the glen, she perceived plainly that there was no one with whom she might be humbly happy and poor—not even a plumber!

This form of human sorrow—certainly one of the worst—is not half enough pitied by the happy.

Of course Laura was a fool—nobody claims for her that she was not; but fools are not rare, either male or female; as they arrange the world and its ways in great measure, it is odd that they do not under-

stand one another better, and whether Laura showed her folly most or least in thinking that she could have been obscurely happy as the wife of a man who belonged to a different class of life from her own (she herself having small intellectual endowments, and but little culture), is a subject too vast, too overwhelming, for decision here; it ought to have a treatise in twelve volumes all to itself.

Mrs. Melcombe had come home also somewhat improved, but a good deal disappointed. She had fully hoped and intended to marry again, because her son, who was to live to be old, would wish to marry early, and her future daughter-in-law would be mistress of the house. It was desirable, therefore, that Peter's mother should not be dependent on him for a home. She had twice been invited, while on the Continent, to change her name; but in each case it would have been, in a worldly point of view, very much to her disadvantage, and that was a species of second marriage that she by no means contemplated. She did not want her second husband to take her that she might nurse him in his old age, fast approaching, and that he might live upon her income.

So she came home *Mrs. Melcombe,* and she continued to be kind to Laura, though she did not sympathize with her; and that was no fault of hers: sympathy is much more an intellectual than a moral endowment. However kind, dull, and stupid people may be, they can rarely sympathize with any trouble unless they have gone through one just like it themselves.

You may hear it said, "Ah, I can sympathize with him, poor fellow, for I have a wooden leg myself," or, "Yes, being a widow, I know what a widow's feelings are," and so on.

No one has a right to blame these people; they are as kind as any; it is not their fault that some are living among them to whom no experience at all is necessary, and who not only could sympathize, but do in thought, with the very angel that never fell, when they consider what it must be to him if the mortal child he has to watch goes wrong; with the poor weak drunkard who wishes he could keep sober, but feels, when he would fain pass by it, that the gin-shop, like a devil-fish, sends forth long tentacles and ruthlessly sucks him in; with the mother-whale, when her wilful young one insists on swimming up

the fiord, and she who has risked her life to warn him must hear the thud of the harpoon in his side; with the old tired horse, when they fetch him in from his sober reverie in the fields, and put his blinkers on; with anything else?—yes, with the bluebells, whose life above ground is so short, when wasteful children tread them down;—these all feel something that one would fain save them from. So perhaps does the rose-tree also, when some careless boy goes by whooping in the joy of his heart, and whips off her buds with his cane.

Fruitful sympathy must doubtless have some likeness of nature, and also a certain kindliness to found itself on; but it comes more from a penetrative keenness of observation, from the patient investigations of thought, from those vivid intuitions that wait on imagination, from a good memory, which can live over again in circumstances that are changed, and from that intelligent possession of the whole of one's foregone life, which makes it impossible to ignore the power of any great emotion or passion merely because it is past. Where these qualities are there should be, for there can be, sympathy.

Mrs. Melcombe was fond of her one child; but she had forgotten what her own nature, thoughts, fears, and wishes, as well as joys, had been in childhood. In like manner, as she was, on the whole, contented herself, she not only thought that her own example ought to make Laura contented, but she frequently pointed this out to her.

The child is to the father and mother, who imparted life to him, and who see his youth, the most excellent consolation that nature can afford them for the loss of their own youth, and for the shortness of life in themselves; but if a mother is therefore convinced that her child is a consoler to those who have none, he is sure, at some time or other, to be considered an unmitigated bore.

Mrs. Melcombe often thought, "Laura has my child with her constantly to amuse her, and has none of the responsibility about him that I have. Laura goes to the shops with me, sees me give the orders, and I frequently even consult her; she goes with me into the garden, and sees the interest I take in the wall-fruit and the new asparagus-bed, and yet she never takes example by me. She will eat just as many of these things as I shall, though she often

follows me about the place looking as if she scarcely cared for them at all."

Laura was pleased, however, to go to Wigfield and stay with Grand, and have for a companion a careless, childish girl, who undertook with enthusiasm to teach her to drive, and if old Grand wanted his horses, would borrow any rats of ponies that she could get.

Laura spent many happy hours with Liz and the Mortimer children, now huddled into an old tub of a punt, eating cakes and curd for lunch, now having a picnic in the wood, and boiling the kettle out of doors, and at other times welcomed into the long loft called "Parliament;" but she seldom saw John Mortimer himself, for Lizzie was always anxious to be back in good time for dinner. She valued her place at the head of the table, and the indulgent old Grand perceived this plainly. He liked Laura well enough; but Liz was the kind of creature whom he could be fond of. They were both foolish girls. Liz took no manner of pains to improve herself any more than Laura did; but Laura was full of uneasy little affectations, capricious changes of manner, and shyness, and Liz was absolutely simple, and as confiding as a child.

The only useful thing the girls did while they stayed with Grand was to go into the town twice a week and devote a couple of hours to a coal and clothing club, setting down the savings of the poor, and keeping the books. This bi-weekly visit had consequences as regarded one of them, but it was the one who did not care what happened; and they parted at the end of their visit, having become a good deal attached to each other, and intending to correspond as fully and frequently as is the manner of girls.

The intelligent mind, it may be taken for granted, is able to grasp the thought that one may be a very fair, and even copious, letter-writer, and yet show nothing like diffusiveness in writing to an ancient aunt.

The leaves were all dropping when Laura came home, and was received into the spirit of the autumn, breathing in that sense of silence that comes from absence of the birds, while in still mornings, unstirred of any wind, the leaves let themselves go, and the flowers give it up and drop and close. She was rather sad; but she found amusement in writing to Liz, and as the days got to their shortest, with

nothing to relieve their monotony, there was pleasure to be got out of the long answers, which set forth how Valentine was really going to be married soon after Christmas, and what Liz was going to wear, how Dorothea was coming down to be married from Wigfield House, to please "sister," and how it would all be such fun—"Only three weeks, Laura dear, to the delightful day!" Finally, how Dorothea had arrived—and oh, such a lovely *trousseau!* and she had never looked half so sweet and pretty before, "and in four days, dear, the wedding is to be; eighty people to breakfast—only think! and you shall be told all about it."

Laura felt herself slightly injured when, a week after this, she had not been told anything. She felt even surprised when another week passed, and yet there was silence; but at the end of it, she came rushing one morning into Amelia's room, quite flushed from excitement, and with an open letter in her hand.

"They're not married at all," she exclaimed, "Valentine and Miss Graham! There has been no wedding, and there is none coming off. Valentine has jilted her."

"Nonsense," cried Mrs. Melcombe. "You must be dreaming—things had gone so far," and she sat down, feeling suddenly weak from amazement.

"But it is so," repeated Laura, "here is the whole account, I tell you. When the time came he never appeared."

"What a disgraceful shame!" exclaimed Amelia, and Laura proceeded to read to her this long-expected letter:—

"DEAREST LAURA,—I don't know how to begin, and I hardly know what to tell you, because I am so ashamed of it all; and I promised to give you an account of the wedding, but I can't. What will you think when I tell you that there was none? Valentine never came. I told you that Dorothea was in the house, but that he had gone away to take leave of various friends, because, after the wedding, they were to sail almost immediately, and so,—I must make short work with this, because I hate it to that degree. There was the great snowstorm, as you know, and when he did not come home we thought he must be blocked up somewhere, and then we were afraid he was very ill. At last when still it snowed,

and still he did not come, Giles went in search of him, and it was not till the very day before the wedding that he got back, having found out the whole detestable thing.

"Poor Val! and we used to think him such a dear fellow. Of course I cannot help being fond of him still, but, Laura, he has disgracefully attached himself to another girl; he could not bear to come home and be married, and he knew St. George would be in such a rage that he did not dare to tell."

"Young scamp!" exclaimed Amelia; "such a tall, handsome fellow to, who would have believed it of him?"

"Well, Laura dear, when I saw St. George come in, I was so frightened that I fainted. Dorothea was quite calm—quite still—she had been so all the time. It makes me cry to think what she must have felt, dear sweet thing; but such a day as that one was, Laura, I cannot describe, and you cannot imagine. The whole country was completely snowed up. St. George had telegraphed to John Mortimer, from London, to be at our house, if possible, by four o'clock, for something had gone wrong, and his horses, because of the deep drift, overturned the

phaeton into a ditch. John rolled out, but managed to wade on to us; he was half covered with snow when I came down just as light was failing, and saw him in the hall stamping about and shaking the snow out of his pockets and from his hair. I heard him sighing and saying how sad it was, for we thought Val must be ill, till Giles came up to him, and in two minutes told him what had happened. Oh I never saw anybody in such a fury as he put himself into! I was quite surprised. He almost stuttered with rage. What was the use either of his storming at Giles, as if he could help it, or indeed any of us? And then sister was very much hurt, for she came hurrying into the hall, and began to cry; she does so like, poor thing, that people should take things quietly. And presently, grinding and crunching through the snow, with four horses, came dear old Grand, done up in comforters, in the close carriage. He had driven round the other way; he knew something was wrong, and he came into the hall with such trembling hands, thinking Val was dying or perhaps dead. And then what a passion he got into, too, when John told him, it's no use at all my trying to explain to you; he actually cried,

and when he had dried his eyes, he shook his fists, and said he was ashamed of his name.

"It was very disagreeable for us, as you may suppose. It was dusk before sister and St. George could get them to think of what we had to do. To send and stop the bells from ringing early the next morning; to stop several people who were coming by rail to dinner that day, and expecting to sleep in the house on account of the unusual weather; to let Dick A'Court know, and the other clergyman, who were to have married them; and to prevent as many people as possible from coming to the breakfast, or to the church; to stop the men who were making a path to it through the drift—Oh you can't think what a confusion there presently was, and we had four or five hired flys in the stable, ready to fetch our friends, and take them to church, too; and there was such a smell all over, of roasting things and baking things. Well, Laura, off we all set into the kitchen, and sent off the hired men with the flys, and every servant we had in the house, male or female —and Grand's men too — excepting sister's little maid to attend to Dorothea. They went with messages and letters and telegrams right and left, to

prevent the disgrace of any more people coming to look at us. And then, when they were all gone, we being in the kitchen, John soon recollected how the cook had begged us to be very particular, and put water every now and then into the boiler, for the pipe that supplied it was frozen, and if we didn't mind it would burst. So off he and Giles had to go into the dark yard and get in some water, and then they had to fetch in coals for the fires, and when John found that all the water in the back kitchen was frozen, and there was none but what was boiling to wash his hands in, he broke out again and denounced Val, and that minute up came the carrier's cart to the back door, having rescued the four smallest Mortimers and Aunt Christie and the nurse, who had been found stuck fast in the sociable in a drift, and in the children burst, full of ecstasy and congratulations, and thinking it the greatest fun in the world that we should all be in the kitchen. And while Grand sat in low spirits at one side of the fire, and they began to amuse themselves by pulling in all the fish-baskets, and parcels, and boxes, and wedding presents, that the carriers had left outside in the snow (because John wouldn't let them come

in and see us), St. George sat at the end of the dresser with his arms folded, smoked a cigar, and held his peace. He must have been very much tired, as well as disgusted, poor fellow, for he had been rushing about the country for three days and nights; so he left all the others to do just what they liked, and say what they liked. And very soon the whole confusion got to its height, by the elder children coming in and being told, and flying at John to condole and cry over him, and entreat him not to mind. John, indeed! just as if we didn't care at all! It was intended that all the children should sleep in our house, for it is so near the church, and nothing could prevent the younger ones from thinking it all the most glorious fun. What with having been stuck fast, and then coming on in the cart and finding us in the kitchen, and having supper there, they were so delighted that they could not conceal their ecstasy.

"As for little Anastasia, when the weights of the great kitchen clock ran down, and it stopped with an awful sort of gasping click, I believe she thought *that was the wedding*, for she ran up to St. George, who still sat on the dresser, and said—

"'Shan't we have another one to-morrow?'

"'No, you *stoopid* little thing!' Bertie said. 'You know Cousin Val won't come to do the marrying.'

"'But somebody must,' she went on, 'else we can't have our new *nopera* cloaks and our satin frocks. Can't papa?'

"'No, papa doesn't wish,' said Bertie; 'I asked him.'

"'Then,' she said, looking up at St. George, and speaking in a very pathetic tone, 'you will, *dear*, won't you? because you know you're so kind.'

"I just happened to glance at St. George then, and you can't think, Laura, how astonished I was. He turned away his face, and sister, who was standing close by, lifted up the child and let her kiss him. Then he got down from the dresser and went away; but, Laura, if he had wished more than anything in the world to marry Dorothea, he might have looked just so.

"Don't tell any one what I have said about this. Perhaps I was mistaken. I will write again soon.

"Ever affectionately yours,

"ELIZABETH GRANT."

"Well," said Mrs. Melcombe, "it's the most disgraceful thing I ever heard of."

"And here is a postscript," remarked Laura; "nothing particular, though:—'P.S.—Dorothea was ill at first; but she is better. I must tell you that dear old Grand, the next morning, apologized to sister for having so lost his temper; he said it was the old Adam that was strong in him still.'"

## CHAPTER XII.

### VALENTINE.

"If he had known where he was going to fall, he could have put down straw."—*Russian Proverb.*

LAURA wrote with difficulty an answer to Lizzy Grant's letter. It is easier for the sister to say, "My brother is a dishonourable young fellow, and has behaved shamefully," than for the friend to answer without offence, "I quite agree with you."

But the next letter made matters in some degree easier, for it at least showed the direction that his family gave to the excuses they now offered for the behaviour of the young scapegrace. First, he had been very unwell in London—almost seriously unwell; and next, Lizzy said she had been quite right as to St. George's love for Dorothea, for he had made her an offer before she left the house.

"In fact," continued Liz, "we have all decided, so far as we can, to overlook what Val has done,

for he is deeply attached to the girl who, without any fault of her own, has supplanted Dorothea. He is already engaged to her, and if he is allowed to marry her early in the spring, and sail for New Zealand, he is not likely ever to return; at any rate, he will not for very many years. In that case, you know, Laura, we shall only be with him about six weeks longer; so I hope our friends will forgive us for forgiving him."

"They are fond of him, that is the fact," observed Mrs. Melcombe; "and to be sure the other brother, wanting to marry Miss Graham, does seem to make some difference, some excuse; but as to his illness, I don't think much of that. I remember when his old father came here to the funeral, I remarked that Valentine looked overgrown, and not strong, and Mr. Mortimer said he had been very delicate himself all his youth, and often had a cough (far more delicate, in fact, than his son was); but he had outgrown it, and enjoyed very fair health for many years."

Then Laura went on reading:—

"Besides, we think that, though Dorothea refused St. George point blank when he made her an offer, yet she would hardly write to him every week as

she does, if she did not like him, and he would hardly be so very silent and reserved about her, and yet evidently in such good spirits, if he did not think that something in the end would come of it."

"No," said Mrs. Melcombe, laughing in a cynical spirit, "the ridiculous scrape they are in does not end with Valentine. If he was really ill, there could be no thought of his marriage with this other girl; and, besides, Miss Graham (if this is true) will have far the best of the two brothers. *St. George*, as they are so fond of calling him (I suppose because Giles is such an ugly name), is far better off than Valentine, and has ten times more sense."

"Dorothea is gone to the Isle of Wight," continued Laura, finishing the letter, "to live with some old friends. She has no relatives, poor girl, excepting a father, who is somewhere at the other end of the world, and he seems to take very little notice of her. There is, indeed, an old uncle, but he lives at sea; he is almost always at sea in his yacht, and her only brother sails with him; but nobody knows in the least where they are now. It is very sad for her, and she told St. George, and sister too, that she had only loved Val out of gratitude, because he seemed so

much attached to her, and because she wanted somebody to devote herself to."

In her next letter Liz told Laura that she herself was to be married shortly to Dick A'Court, "who says he fell in love with me when we two used to add up the coal-and-clothing cards." In these words, and in no more, the information was imparted, and the rest of the letter was so stiff and formal that Laura's pleasure in the correspondence ended with it. The realities of life were beginning to make her child-friend feel sober and reticent.

Laura wrote a long effusive letter in reply, full of tender congratulations on the high lot that awaited Liz as the helpmeet of a devoted clergyman, also on the joys of happy lovers; but this composition did not touch the feelings of Liz in the right place. "Just as if I had not told her," she thought, "that Emily was come home from India, and that I had consented to accept Dick partly to please her, because she was sure I should be sorry for it afterwards if I didn't. So I dare say I should have been," she continued thoughtfully. "In fact, I am almost sure of it. But I know very well, whatever Emily may say, that Dick will make me do just as he likes. I

am sure I shall have to practise those quire boys of his, and they will bawl in my ears and call me teacher."

So thinking, Liz allowed herself to drift towards matrimony without enthusiasm, but with a general notion that, as most people were married sooner or later, no doubt matrimony was the proper thing and the best thing on the whole. "And I shall certainly go through with it, now I have promised," she further reflected, "for it would never do for another of us to behave badly just at the last."

It was the last week in March, and Laura was loitering through the garden one morning before breakfast, when Mrs. Melcombe came out to her in some excitement with a note in her hand, which had been sent on from the inn, and which set forth that Mr. Brandon, having business in that immediate neighbourhood, would, if agreeable to her, do himself the pleasure of calling some time that morning. He added that he had brought a book for Miss Melcombe from his sister.

"I have sent to the inn," said Mrs. Melcombe, "to beg that he will come on here to breakfast."

Laura had been gathering a bunch of violets, and she rushed up-stairs and put them into her hair.

Then in a great hurry she changed her toilette, and, after ascertaining that the guest had arrived, she came languidly into the breakfast-room, a straw-hat hanging by its strings from her arm, and filled with primroses and other flowers. She felt as she approached that all this looked quite romantic, but it did not look so real and so unpremeditated as might have been wished.

Mrs. Melcombe had also changed her array. Little Peter, like most other children, was always the picture of cleanly neatness when first he left his nurse's hand in the morning, and his mother was much pleased at the evident interest with which their guest regarded him, asking him various questions about his lessons, his sports, and his pony. She had been deeply gratified at the kind way in which all the Mortimers and their connections had received her boy; none of them seemed at all jealous. Even Valentine had never hinted or even looked at her as if he felt that the property ought not to have gone to the younger branch.

Peter, now ten years old, and but a small boy for his age, had an average degree of intelligence; and as he sat winking and blinking in the morning sun-

shine, he constantly shook back a lock of hair that fell over his forehead, till Brandon, quietly putting his hand to it, moved it away, and while the boy related some childish adventure that he had encouraged him to talk of, looked at him with scrutinizing and, as it seemed to his mother, with almost anxious attention.

"Peter has been very poorly several times this winter," she remarked. "I mean shortly to take him out for change of air."

"His forehead looks pale," said Brandon, withdrawing his hand, and for a minute or two he seemed lost in thought, till Mrs. Melcombe, expressing a hope that he would stay at her house as long as his affairs detained him in that neighbourhood, he accepted her invitation with great readiness. He would spend that day and the next with her, and, if she would permit it, he would walk with young hopeful to his tutor's house, and come back again in time for luncheon.

"I declare, he scarcely spoke to me all breakfast-time," thought Laura. "I consider him decidedly a proud man, and any one might think he had come to see Peter rather than to see us."

Brandon evidently did wish to walk with the boy, and accordingly rose as soon as he had finished his breakfast, Mrs. Melcombe giving him some directions, and a key to let himself in with by a side gate.

All the intelligence Brandon possessed, and all his keenness of observation, he exercised during his walk with the little heir. He could generally attract children, and Peter was already well inclined toward him, for he had shown himself to be knowing about a country boy's pleasures; also he knew all about the little Mortimers and their doings.

Brandon wished to see Melcombe, even to examine some parts of the house and grounds, and he wanted if possible to hear something more about the ghost story; but it did not suit him to betray any special interest. So he left it to work its way to the surface if it would. It was not the business he had come about, but he had undertaken to transact that, on purpose because it gave him a chance of looking at the place.

This was the deep glen, then, that he had heard Valentine speak of?

"Yes; and mother says the old uncle Mortimer (that one who lived at Wigfield) improved it so

much; he had so many trees thinned out, and a pond dug where there used to be a swamp. We've got some carp in that pond. Do you think, if I fed them, they would get tame?"

Brandon told some anecdote of certain carp that he had seen abroad, and then asked—

"Do you like the glen, my boy—is it a favourite place of yours?"

"Pretty well," answered Peter. "There are not so many nests, though, as there used to be. It used to be quite dark with trees."

"Did you like it then?"

"Yes, it was jolly; but——"

"But what?" asked Brandon carelessly.

"Grandmother didn't like it," said the boy.

Brandon longed to ask why.

"She was very old, my grandmother."

"Yes. And so she didn't like the glen?"

"No; but the old uncle has had a walk, a sort of path, made through it; and mamma says I may like it as much as I please, so does aunt Laura. "You know," continued the child, in an argumentative tone, "there's no place in the world where somebody hasn't died."

"Now, what does this mean?" thought Brandon. "I would fain raise the ghost if I could. Is he coming up now, or is he not?"

Presently, however, Peter made some allusion to the family misfortune—the death of the eldest son, by which Brandon perceived that it had taken place in the glen. He then dropped the subject, nothing more that was said till a few minutes before they reached the tutor's lodgings being of the least interest. Then, as they turned the edge of a wood, Peter looked back.

"You won't forget the turn of the lane you are to take, will you, Mr. Brandon? and you've got the key?"

"Yes," said Brandon.

"It's a green sort of door, in the park-paling. A new one has been made, because that one was so shabby. It's the one my uncles went through when they ran away, you know."

"What uncles?" asked Brandon, not at all suspecting the truth, and not much interested.

"Why, that one who belonged to you," said Peter, "and the other one who belongs to Bertie and Hugh. Didn't you know?" he exclaimed, having observed the momentary flash of surprise that Brandon made

haste to conceal. "They ran away," he repeated, as Brandon walked beside him making no answer, "a very long time before my mamma was born, and they never came back any more till I was nearly six years old."

"So that's your tutor's house, is it?" said Brandon, and thereupon he took leave of him.

"Amazing!" he said to himself as he walked away. "What next, I wonder?"

As he returned he revolved this information in his mind with increasing surprise. John Mortimer had a proud and confident way of talking about his father that did not sound as if he knew that he had begun life by running away from home. Valentine, he was well aware, knew nothing about it.

Coming on, he turned aside to talk to some men who were digging a well. He knew how to talk to working people, and, what is more to the purpose, he knew how to make them talk; but though they proffered a good deal of information about the neighbourhood, nothing was said that gave him any of the knowledge he wanted. And shortly he went on, and let himself in at the little gate with his key. It was not yet eleven o'clock, and as he did not want to see

the ladies of the family so soon, he determined to go down into the steep glen and look about him.

He had no doubt now that to this place the superstitious story belonged.

First, he skirted it all about. From above it was nearly as round as a cup, and as deep in proportion to its size. The large old trees had been left, and appeared almost to fill it up, their softly rounded heads coming to within three feet of the level where he stood. All the mother birds — rooks, jays, thrushes, and pigeons—were plainly in view under him, as they sat brooding on their nests among the topmost twigs, and there was a great cawing and crowing of the cock-birds while they flew about and fed their mates. The leaves were not out; their buds only looked like green eggs spotting the trees, excepting that here and there a horse-chestnut, forwarder than its brethren, was pushing its crumpled foliage out of the pale-pink sheath. Everywhere saplings had been cut down, and numbers of them strewed the damp mossy ground; but light penetrated, and water trinkled, there was a pleasant scent of herbs and flowers, and the whole place was cheerful with growth and spring.

A set of winding steps cut in the soft, red rock led into the glen just where the side was steepest, and Brandon, intent on discovery, sprang lightly down them. He wandered almost everywhere about the place. It seemed to hold within itself a different climate from the world above, where keen spring air was stirring; here hardly a breath moved, and in the soft sheltered warmth the leaves appeared visibly to be expanding. He forgot his object, also another object that he had in view (the business, in fact, which had brought him), leaned against the trunk of a horse-chestnut, listened to the missel-thrushes, looked at a pine-tree a little way off, that was letting down a mist of golden dust, and presently lost himself in a reverie, finding, as is the way with a lover, that the scene present, whatever it may happen to be, was helping to master his every-day self, was indeed just the scene to send him plunging yet further down into the depths of his passionate dream.

He had stood leaning against the tree, with his hat at his feet and his arms folded, for perhaps half an hour. He had inherited a world (with an ideal companion), had become absorbed into a lifetime of

hope; and his love appeared to grow without let or hindrance in the growing freshness and glorious expansion of the spring.

Half an hour of hope and joy consoles for much foregone trouble, and further satisfies the heart by making it an easier thing to believe in more yet to come.

A sudden exclamation and a little crash roused him.

Laura! She had come to visit her favourite tree, and lo! a man there at last, leaning against it lost in thought, and so absolutely still that she had not noticed him.

She knew in an instant that this was not Joseph, and yet as the sight of him flashed on her sense before recognition, the nothingness she always found gave way to a feeling as of something real, that almost might have been the right thing. As for him, though he saw her flitting figure, she did not for the twinkling of an eye pass for the ghost he had come to look for. He roused himself up in an instant. "Whew!" was his inward thought, "she is alone; what could be so lucky! I'll do the business at once, and get it over."

Picking up his hat, and sinking at every step into the soft cushions of moss, he accordingly approached her and said, but perhaps just a little coldly, "I did not expect to see you here, Miss Melcombe."

Laura perceived this slight tinge of coldness as plainly as he did the improvement in her appearance since he had first seen her in the morning, for surprise at detecting him had overpowered her affectation. She had coloured from having been startled, and while she, from habit, moved on mechanically to the tree, she answered quite simply and naturally that she walked that way almost every day.

Brandon turned and walked with her. Opposite to the said tree, and very near it, was another, under which stood a bench. Laura sat down, and while pointing out the spot where certain herons had built their platform-like nests, began to recover herself, or rather to put on the damaging affectation which in a moment of forgetfulness she had thrown off.

Brandon did not sit beside her, but while she arranged her dress to her mind, threw her plaid shawl into becoming folds, and laying her hand on her bracelet, furtively drew the ornament upon it to the

upper side, he looked at her and thought what a goose she was.

She wore a straw hat with so wide a brim that as he stood before her he did not see her face, and he was not sorry for this; it was not his business to reprove her, but what he had to say would, he supposed, put her a good deal out of countenance.

He was just about to speak, and Laura was in the full enjoyment of feeling how romantic it was to be there alone with a young man, was just wishing that some of her friends could be looking down from above to see this interesting picture, and draw certain conclusions, when a decidedly sharp voice called out from behind, "Laura! what can you be doing here? You know I don't like you to be for ever coming to that tree.—Laura!"

"Yes, I'm here," said Laura, and Mrs. Melcombe, arrayed in blue poplin, stepped into view, and made Brandon feel very foolish and Laura very cross.

"Oh! you've brought Mr. Brandon here to see the carp," said Amelia graciously, but she hardly knew what to think, and they all presently went to the pond, and watched the creatures flashing up their golden sides, each wondering all the time what the

two others were thinking of. Then as it was nearly lunch time, Amelia and Laura proceeded to leave the dell, Brandon attending them and helping them up the steps. He was rather vexed that he had not been able to say his say and give Laura a certain packet that he had in his possession; and as the afternoon presently clouded over and it began to pour with rain, he hardly knew what to do with himself till the bright idea occurred to him that he would ask Mrs. Melcombe to show him the old house.

Up and down stairs and into a good many rooms they all three proceeded together. Hardly any pictures to found a question or a theory on; no old china with a story belonging to it; no brown books that had been loved by dead Melcombes. This could not have been a studious race. Not a single anecdote was told of the dead all the time they went over the place, till at last Mrs. Melcombe unlocked the door of a dark, old-fashioned sitting-room upstairs, and going to the shutters opened one of them, saying, "This is the room in which the dear old grandmother spent the later years of her life."

This really was an interesting old room. Laura

and Amelia folded back the shutters with a genuine air of reverence and feeling. It was most evident that they had loved this woman whose son had forbidden her to leave her property to him.

Two or three dark old pictures hung on the walls, and there was a cabinet on which Laura laying her hand, said—

"The dear grandmother kept all her letters here."

"Indeed," Brandon answered; "it must have been very interesting to you to look them over. (And yet," he thought, "you don't look as if you had found in them anything of much interest.")

"We have never opened it," said Mrs. Melcombe. "Mr. Mortimer, when he was here, proposed to look over and sort all the letters for me, but I declined his offer."

("And no doubt made him miserable by so doing") was Brandon's next thought.

"I shall keep the key for my dear boy," she continued, "and give it to him when he comes of age."

("To find out something that he will wish he didn't know,") thought Brandon again. ("That cabinet, as likely as not, contains the evidence of *it*, whatever *it* is.")

"And in this gallery outside," she proceeded, "the dear grandmother used to walk every day."

Brandon perceived that he had got to the core and heart of the place at last. His interest was so intense that he failed to conceal it. He walked to the window and noticed the pouring rain that was streaming between the rustic pillars of the balustrades into the garden below. He examined the pictures; only two of them were portraits, but in the background of one was an undoubted representation of the house itself; the other was a portrait of a beautiful boy in a blue jacket and a shirt with a wide frill laid back and open at the neck. Under his arm appeared the head of a greyish dog.

"That creature," Brandon thought, "is almost exactly like my old dog Smokey. I am very much mistaken if this is not the portrait of one of his ancestors."

He turned to ask some question about it, and observed to his surprise that Mrs. Melcombe had left the room, and he was alone with Laura, who had seated herself on a sofa and taken a long piece of crochet-work from her pocket, which she was doing almost with the air of one who waits patiently till somebody else has finished his investigations.

"I thought you would be interested in that picture," she said; "you recognise it, I suppose?"

"No!" he exclaimed.

"It used not to be here," said Laura; "the dear grandmother, as long as she lived, always had it in her bedroom. It's Mr. Mortimer, your step-father, when he was a boy, and that was his dog, a great favourite; when he ran away the dog disappeared—it was always supposed that it ran after him. I suppose," continued Laura, impelled to say this to some one who was sure to be impressed by it—"I suppose nobody ever did mourn as my grandmother did over the loss of those two sons. Yet she never used to blame them."

They did run away then, and they did keep away, and yet she did not blame them. How deeply pathetic these things seemed. Whatever it might be that had made his step-father write that letter, it appeared now to be thrown back to the time when he had divided himself thus from his family and taken his boy brother with him.

"And that other portrait," said Laura, "we found up in one of the garrets, and hung here when the house was restored. It is the portrait of my grand-

mother's only brother, who was sixteen or eighteen years younger than she was. His name was Melcombe, which was her maiden name, but ours, you know, was really Mortimer. It is very much darkened by time and neglect, and never was of any particular value."

"What has he got under his arm?" said Brandon.

"I think it is a cocked hat or some kind of hat. I think they wore cocked hats then in the navy; he was a lieutenant in the navy. You see some sort of gold lace on it, and on the hilt of his sword."

"Did he die at sea?" asked Brandon.

"Yes. My great-grandfather left this place to his son, and as he died unmarried it was to come to our eldest uncle, and then to grandmother, as it did, you know."

"'Its name was Melcombe, and it came from the sea,'" Brandon repeated inwardly, adding, "Well, the *ghost* can have had nothing to do with this mystery. I shall trouble myself no more about him."

"He was only about a year older than my oldest uncle," proceeded Laura, "for grandmother married at seventeen."

Brandon looked again. Something in the two

pictures reminded him of the portraits of the Flambourgh family. They had evidently been done by the same artist. Each youth had something under his left arm, each was turning his face slightly, and they both looked the same way. Young Daniel Mortimer was so placed that his quiet eyes seemed to be always regarding the hearth, now empty of warmth. The other, hung on the same wall, seemed to look out into the garden, and Laura said in a sentimental way that, considering the evident love she had borne her grandmother, was not at all out of place.

"There is a bed of lilies that dear grandmother used to love to watch, and Amelia and I thought it interesting when we had had this picture put up to observe that its eyes seemed to fall on the same place. They were not friends, my grandmother and her brother, and no doubt after his death my grandmother laid their frequent quarrels to heart, for she could never bear to mention him, though she had a beautiful monument put up to his memory. You must go and see it, Mr. Brandon. We have lately had it cleaned, and dear grandmother's name added under his."

"I will," said Brandon.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### VENERABLE ANCIENTRY.

"Even as the sparrow findeth an house, and the swallow a nest for herself where she may lay her young, so I seek thine altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King and my God."—PSALM lxxxiv., Marginal Translation.

RISING early the next morning, Brandon found that he had an hour to spare before breakfast, and sallied forth for an early walk. A delicate hoar-frost still made white the shade, and sparkled all over the sombre leaves of some fine yew-trees that grew outside the garden wall.

Walking up a little rise, he saw the weathercock and one turret of a church tower peering over the edge of a small steep hill, close at hand, and turning toward it he went briskly on, under the lee of a short fir plantation, all the grass being pure and fresh with hoar-frost, which melted in every hollow and shadow as fast as the sun came round to it.

The house was too large and pretentious for the

grounds it stood in, these being hardly extensive enough to be called a park; they consisted of finely varied wood and dell, and were laid out in grass and fed off by sheep.

He passed through a gate into the churchyard, which had a very little valley all to itself, the land rising on every side so as to make a deep nest for it. Such a venerable, low, long church! taking old age so quietly, covering itself with ivy and ferns, and having a general air of mossiness, and subsidence into the bosom of the earth again, from whence its brown old stones had been quarried. For, as is often the case with an old burial-place, the soil had greatly risen, so that one who walked between the graves could see the whole interior of the place through the windows. The tiled roof, sparkling and white with the morning frost, was beginning to drip, and dew shone on the melting rime, while all around the enclosure orchards were planted, and the trees leaned over their boughs.

A woman, stepping from a cottage on the rise, held up a great key to him, and he advanced, took it, and told her he would return it.

A large heavy thing it was, that looked as if it

might be hundreds of years old; he turned the lock with it and stepped in, walking down the small brick aisle, observing the ancient oaken seats, the quaint pulpit, and strange brasses; till, white, staring, obtrusive, and all out of taste, he saw in the chancel what he had come to look for, a great white marble monument, on the south side; four fluttering cherubs with short wings that appeared to hold up a marble slab, while two weeping figures knelt below. First was recorded on the slab the death of Augustus Cuthbert Melcombe, only son of Cuthbert Melcombe, gent., of this place. Then followed the date of his birth, and there was no date of death, merely the information that he was a lieutenant in the Royal Navy. Brandon copied this inscription into his note-book.

Below was the name of the young man's only sister, aged ninety-seven, "universally beloved and respected;" then the solemn words used before death by the aged patriarch, "I have waited for Thy Salvation, O Lord." All about the chancel were various small tablets in memory of the successive vicars of the place and their families, but no others with the name of Melcombe on them. The whole building was so overflowing with the records of

human creatures, inside and out, it appeared as if so saturated with man's thoughts, so used to man's prayers and tears, so about presently to decline and subside into the earth as he does, that there was almost an effort in beliving that it was empty of the beings it seemed to be a part of—empty of those whom we call the living.

It was easy to move reverently and feel awed in the face of this venerable ancientry. This was the place, then, where that poor woman had worshipped whose son "had never judged her."

"If I settled," he thought, "in a new country, this is the sort of scene that, from time to time, would recur to my thoughts and get hold of me, with almost intolerable power to make life one craving for home.

"How hard to take root in a soil my fathers never ploughed! Let me abide where my story grew, where my dead are laid, in a country full of days, full of the echoes of old Englishmen's talk, and whose sunsets are stained as if with the blood shed for their liberties."

He left the church, noticing, as he went down the aisle, numbers of dogs'-eared books in the

different pews, and the narrow window at the east end now letting in long shafts of sunshine; but there was nothing to inform him of any fact that threw light on his step-father's letter, and he returned the key to the sexton's wife, and went back to breakfast, telling Mrs. Melcombe where he had been, and remarking that there was no date of death on Augustus Melcombe's tomb.

"I think they did not know the date," she replied. "It was during the long French war that he died, and they were some time uncertain of the fact, but at length the eldest son going to London, wrote his mother an account of how he had met with the captain of his young uncle's ship, and had been told of his death at sea, somewhere near the West Indies. The dear grandmother showed me that letter," observed Mrs. Melcombe, "when first I married."

Brandon listened attentively, and when he was alone set that down also in his note-book, then considering that neither the ghost nor the young lieutenant need trouble him further, he felt that all his suspicions were cast loose into a fathomless sea, from which he could fish nothing up; but the little

heir was well and happy, and he devoutly hoped that he would remain so, and save to himself the anxiety of showing, and to Valentine the pain and doubt that would come of reading the letter.

Mrs. Melcombe, narrow as were her thoughts, was, notwithstanding, a schemer in a small way. She had felt that Brandon must have had something to say to Laura when she herself coming up had interrupted him. Laura had few reserves from her, so when she had ascertained that nothing had occurred when she had left them together in the grandmother's sitting-room but such talk as naturally arose out of the visit to it, she resolved to give him another opportunity, and after breakfast was about to propose a walk, when he helped her by asking her to show him that room again.

"I should like so much to have a photograph of Mr. Mortimer's picture," he said; "may I see it again?"

Nothing more easy. They all went up to the room; a fire had been lighted to air it, because its atmosphere had felt chilly the day before. Laura seated herself again on the sofa. Brandon, with pen and ink, began trying to make a sketch of the por-

trait, and very soon found himself alone with Laura, as he had fully expected would be the case. Whereupon, sitting with his back to her, and working away at his etching, he presently said—

"I mentioned yesterday to Mrs. Melcombe that I had come on business."

"Yes," Laura answered.

"So as it concerns only you, I will, if you please, explain it now."

As he leaned slightly round towards her Laura looked up, but she was mute through surprise. There was something in this voice at once penetrative and sweet; but now she was again conscious of what sounded like a delicately-hinted reproof.

"A young man," he proceeded, "whom I have known almost all my life—in fact, I may call him a friend of mine—told me of an event that had taken place—he called it a misfortune that had befallen him. It had greatly unsettled him, he said, for a long time; and now that he was getting over it, and wanted to forget it, he wished for a change, would like to go abroad, and asked if I could help him. I have many foreign acquaintances. It so chanced that I had just been applied to by one of

them to send him out an Englishman, a clerk, to help him with his English correspondence. So I proposed to this young fellow to go, and he gladly consented."

Laura said nothing. Brandon's words did not lead her to think of Joseph. So she thought of him, wishing she had been so led. She noticed, however, a slight emphasis in the words which informed her that the young man, whoever he was, "was getting over his misfortune, and wanted to forget it."

"It was very kind of you," she said at last, after a long pause.

Brandon turned. Her words were ambiguous, and he wished to be understood. "You observe, no doubt, Miss Melcombe," he said, "that I am speaking of Joseph Swan?"

"Joseph Swan!" Laura repeated, "then he is going away?"

"Yes; but when I had secured this situation for him, he said he felt that he must tell me what had occurred. He told me of an attachment that he had formed, and whatever I may think as to the prudence displayed in the affair, you know best whether *he* was at all to blame. He had received certain promises, so he assured me, and for a long

time he had buoyed himself up with hope, but after that, feeling himself very much injured, and knowing that he had been deceived, he had determined to go away."

Laura had never expected to have her conduct brought home to her, and she had actually been almost unaware that she was to blame.

"It was Amelia's doing," she murmured.

Brandon was anxious to speak guardedly, and would not mention Joseph's name again lest Mrs. Melcombe should enter suddenly and hear it, so he answered, "Yes; and the young man told me he knew you were very much afraid of your sister-in-law. It appears, however, that you had written to him."

"I did, two or three times," said Laura.

"So in case you should in after years feel anxious as to what had become of those letters, or should feel some compunction for groundless hopes excited and for causeless caprice, I undertook to tell you as a message from this young man, that, considering you to be completely under the dominion of your sister-in-law, he does not at all blame you, he does not admit that you are in fault; in one sense, now that he can look back on his attachment as over, he

declares that he is the better for it, because it induced him to work hard at improving himself. He is to go out to Santo Domingo, where, in a new climate, and hearing a new language, he can begin life afresh; but he wishes you to be assured that he shall never trouble or annoy you, and he returns you your letters. I promised to say all this to you as a message from this young man—a young man who, whatever the world may call him, deserves, I think, by you (and me) to be from henceforth always regarded as a gentleman. Will you allow me to give you this packet?"

He had risen as he spoke, and while approaching her produced a small packet carefully done up; but Laura did not stir. She had dropped her hands on her knees, and he, stooping, laid it upon them, when meeting her eyes for a moment, he observed with amazement and discomfiture that she was silent not from shame and compunction for what had seemed very unfeminine and heartless conduct, but from a rapture that seemed too deep for words.

"Miss Melcombe!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," she answered, in a low voice. "It is an island that he is going to then. I always thought

I should not mind marrying him if he would go to a desert island. And so he loved me, really and truly?"

"It appears that he did, *some time ago*," said Brandon, rather pointedly.

"Does any one else know," Laura asked, "but you?"

"Yes; John Mortimer does."

Laura blushed deeply.

"Joseph told him first about this affair, but did not divulge the lady's name. After all was settled, he acknowledged to us both that you were the lady. John was very glad that I was willing personally to give the letters into your own hands again."

"I suppose he thought I had been very imprudent?"

Brandon recalled the scene. John had in fact expressed himself to that effect in no measured terms; but he had been pleasant and even cordial to Joseph, partly because the young man declared the thing to be quite over, partly because he did him the justice to remember that such an acquaintance must always have been begun by the woman. It could not possibly be Joe's doing that he had corresponded with Laura Melcombe.

Laura repeated her words.

"I suppose he thought I had been very imprudent?"

"Perhaps he did."

"Perhaps he thought I had been heartless too?"

"Not to bring the thing to a decided and honourable termination?—yes, probably. He remarked that it certainly was most unnecessary to have behaved as you have done."

"How so, Mr. Brandon?"

"I believe, indeed I am sure, that you are of age?"

"Yes, I am. He meant that no one can really prevent my doing as I please; but Amelia wanted me to ignore the whole thing because she was so ashamed of him and his people."

"He told John so."

"And what did he answer?"

"Among other things, he said he was glad it was all over."

"Yes," said Laura, not in the least impressed by this hint, "but what else?"

"He said, 'Joe, you ought to have been above wanting to marry any woman who was ashamed of you. *I* wouldn't do such a thing on any account.'"

"He said that?" cried Laura, rather startled.

"Yes, and I quite agreed with him—I told Joe that I did."

"Did he say anything more?"

Brandon hesitated, and at length, finding that she would wait till he spoke, he said—

"He told Joe he ought to be thankful to have the thing over, and said that he had come out of it well, and the lady had not."

"Amelia is not half so unkind as you are," said Laura, when she had made him say this, and a quiet tear stole down her cheek and dropped on her hand.

"Pardon me! I think that for myself I have expressed no opinion but this one, that Joe Swan deserves your respect for the manly care he has taken to shield you from blame, spare you anxiety, and terminate the matter properly."

"Terminate!" repeated Laura; "yes, that is where you are so unkind."

"Am I expected to help her to bring it on again?" thought Brandon. "No; I have a great respect for fools, and they must marry like other people; but oh, Joey, Joey Swan, if you are one, which I thought you the other day (and the soul of honour

too !), I think if you still cared about it, you could soon get yourself mated with a greater one still ! Laura Melcombe would be at least a fair match for you in that particular. But no, Joey, I decline to interfere any further."

END OF VOL. I.

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